



*ESSENTIAL  
TEACHINGS*

*Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto*

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*A collection of translated Dhamma talks  
by Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto*

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By Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto

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# *Introduction*

**B**uddhism is a science of the mind. It is based on the principle of cause and effect—a relationship which can be proven and the Buddha was the first person to do so.

We are all made up of the mind and the body; they are like twins. However, the mind is eternal, whereas the body is temporary. The mind passes through a succession of previous lives and takes possession of the body at conception. After the cessation of the body, the mind goes on to another body. It is as simple as that.

On one level, all religions are similar: they all teach you to do good and abstain from harming others; their teachings are based on the relation between cause and effect. Happiness or positive feelings arise from doing good deeds. Suffering or negative feelings arise from doing bad deeds.

There are three principal actions: mental action, verbal action, and physical action. The results of these actions all come back to the mind, which is the primary actor. The mouth and the body are secondary actors. To restrain them, we need to have a 'braking system'.

This so-called braking system is ‘mindfulness’. With mindfulness, we’ll be aware whether our thoughts are wholesome or not. Unwholesome thoughts only harm oneself. But sometimes we do not know what is bad for us, because we’re deluded—like when we take drugs, and so we need the truth to cure our delusion.

We have to learn the truth from people who have already discerned the truth, such as the Buddha and his noble disciples. People who have yet to penetrate the truth will have to learn from those who already have. The knowledge we gain from university (i.e., academic studies) does not teach us what is good and what is bad; such knowledge only deludes us.









# *Chapter I*

## *Listening with mindfulness*

*9 April 2003*

**B**uddhism is the teachings of the Buddha—the Rightly Self-awakened One, who realised the truth and saw things clearly. The Dhamma that the Buddha taught is real—relevant and timeless—as practitioners can see and prove it for themselves. His teachings, or the Dhamma, will guide those who practise to real happiness and success. The Buddha is the One who knows: ‘Buddha’ means ‘to know’. The Buddha is an enlightened noble being (*arahant*). For he is the One without any defilements (*kilesas*), that is, without greed, hatred, and delusion.

The Buddha’s propounding of his Dhamma was truly out of his pure and good intentions. There was no desire for any material gain or anything else. There was no expectation from anyone by putting forth his teachings. His heart was already brimming with eternal bliss; his teachings were, therefore, purely out of his compassion.

He noticed that all sentient beings in this world were still blinded by delusions (*moha*). Ignorance (*avijjā*) was still pervasive in their hearts and minds; it gulls them into being subjected to the endless cycle of rebirth and death—the burden of suffering due to being born, ageing, getting ill, and dying—without any ends in sight.

Without heeding the Buddha's Dhamma, there is no chance to be liberated from this perpetual cycle of rebirth and death.

The Buddha himself was also once subjected to this endless cycle. In each realm and existence, he experienced sufferings (*dukkha*). The term *bhava-jāti* (existence-birth), in fact, means sufferings. When there are birth, growth, and existence, there must then also be ceasing. With ceasing naturally come sufferings, sadness, and lament for all sentient beings.

The Buddha discerned such sufferings thoroughly. After having gained his unequivocal knowledge of Dhamma through practice and liberated himself from the endless cycle of rebirth and death, his compassion and empathy compelled him to help and salvage other sentient beings, who were still subjected to such an endless cycle, so that they would have a chance of ridding themselves of *dukkha*.

The Buddha hence put forth his teachings of the Dhamma to those who were interested. Having listened to his Dhamma, they began putting his teachings into practice out of faith and conviction. They also managed to liberate themselves from sufferings. Therefore, the Buddha was a noble teacher: a mentor, not a God or someone who could grant people their wishes, so that they would be free of sufferings among other things.

Paying respect to the Buddha is thus not for the sake of wishing and asking for things from him. But it is out of respect and gratitude—being aware of the insurmountable compassion that he had for all sentient beings. It is also to recollect the noble path—the proper conduct of his that he had practised and then demonstrated to us. We are, therefore, learners who believe in his teachings and try to put them into practice with confidence, sheer effort, mindfulness, and wisdom.

We believe that despite having been set forth over 2,500 years ago, the Buddha's teachings are still proper, effective, and relevant to those who practise. His Dhamma has not at all declined over time like many other things in this world. Both objects and people are bound to gradually disintegrate over time. Any objects that have been created will eventually deteriorate after a certain period of time, as our bodies and those of animals will. Once there's birth, there will be growth, ageing, illness, and death to follow; it is just how things are in this world.

The Buddha's teachings are, however, different: they remain the same and constant, both in terms of causes and effects. Whoever practises accordingly will surely reap good results. Regardless of the Buddha's enlightenment and demonstration of his teachings, Dhamma will still be Dhamma. The Buddha was just someone who did a thorough investigation until he discovered the Dhamma and then taught it to others.

Those with conviction, who put the Dhamma into practice, are bound to gain the very same result that the Buddha and his noble disciples did in the past. It is timeless—just as there were people who managed to liberate themselves during the Buddha’s time, those who follow and practise according to the Buddha’s teachings can still manage to rid themselves of sufferings today. It is not as if the Buddha had taken the Dhamma with him once he proceeded to his final liberation.

The Dhamma belongs to Buddhism; it belongs to this world. It all depends on the faith of those who have heard—how much confidence and conviction, how much effort and diligence, and how much determination and perseverance they have to practise according to the Buddha’s teachings. If they manage to practise well and properly, they will surely see a result—a decrease in sufferings in proportion to the level of their practice. Happiness will continually increase to the point where there is only contentment in one’s heart.

Those who have heard and listened to the Buddha’s teachings should put them into practice. Don’t procrastinate. Some people just keep putting off their practice despite having heard of the Buddha’s teachings: to do wholesome acts, to forego any wrongdoing, and to purify one’s mind from greed, hatred, and delusion. They keep having an excuse of awaiting a new Buddha to become enlightened. They just want to keep accumulating their

perfections (*pāramī*) for now by making merit and giving. They don't want to maintain the precepts just yet, nor do they want to practise Dhamma by sitting in meditation and cultivating wisdom (*vipassanā*). This is because they are still not convinced that they can be liberated in this lifetime.

They think that it can only happen when the next Buddha (*Buddha Ariya Metteyya*) has become enlightened. They would need to hear and listen to his Dhamma directly in order to liberate themselves. To think in such a way is wrong. Such a belief is based on delusion—something that arises out of weakness and attachment to worldly pleasures (*kāma-sukha*)—thinking that such pleasures are sublime.

In reality, those who truly know—the Buddha and his noble disciples—are fully aware that worldly pleasures are neither true nor sublime. The true happiness comes from peace and calm (*santi-sukha*). It is a kind of happiness that comes from practising Dhamma, sitting in meditation, and cultivating wisdom in order to forego things—to rid oneself of craving and desire and to eliminate greed, hatred, and delusion from one's mind.

As long as there still remain craving and desire in one's heart, all the happiness and pleasures from sight, sound, odour, taste, and touch—no matter how much—will be fleeting. They are temporary—only last while experiencing them. After that, there will be even more craving to experience such pleasures, just as

we've experienced them from the day that we were born up until now. We have yet to feel enough and satisfied. We still constantly crave to see forms, hear sounds, taste flavours, smell odours, and feel touches.

This is a delusion—to think that experiencing these sensual pleasures would bring happiness. Little did you know that you've already become a slave of your sensual craving. That is, if you somehow don't manage to consume or experience such sensual pleasures when you're longing for them, i.e., sexual/sensual craving (*rāga-taṇhā* or *kāma-rāga*), you'll suffer and feel discontent. You'll have to find a way to experience pleasing sights, sounds, odours, tastes, and touch. After being content for a while, another craving will reoccur; that's how such an endless cycle is formed and carries on.

Even after you die, your mind still holds onto these cravings, and so it will search for these sensual contacts in the next realm and existence. You will have to be reborn in a sensual realm where sentient beings can experience such sensual pleasures. This can range from the heavenly realm of devas, that of humans, that of animals, that of ghosts, that of demons, to that of evil/hell beings; they are the places for sentient beings that are still attached to and have desires for sensual pleasures. As long as your craving for sensual contact has not been curbed and eliminated, you'll still be bound to be reborn in this endless cycle.

The type of realm in which you will be reborn depends on how you sought out your sensual pleasures. You would be reborn in the realm of happiness after you die if you sought pleasures out in a skilful way—with good and pure intentions: not through killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and substance abuse. You may be reborn in the heavenly realm of devas or in the human realm.

But if you sought out the sensual pleasures in an unskilful way—with wrong intentions: through killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and substance abuse, you will then be reborn in those four lower realms of animals, ghosts, demons, and evil/hell beings. Your mistaking of sensual experiences and pleasures through sights, sounds, odours, tastes, and touch for happiness will subject you to the endless cycle of rebirth and death in these sensual realms.

Having come across Buddhism and learning about the real kind of happiness, you'll be able to rid yourself of your craving for sensual pleasures through practice. It will allow you to experience a kind of happiness that is pure and not gained through any means—one that can be found within your heart. You will find that the happiness that comes from the peace of mind is much more superior—one that is not reliant on external factors, such as people and things.

All you have to do is to find somewhere quiet, focus your mind not to think about other things, and concentrate on a Dhamma-related subject, such as ‘Buddho’ and any chanting verses. You may also watch your breathing by being aware of each in-breath and out-breath to control your mindfulness. This is to prevent your mind from thinking about other things. Be they in the past or in the future and good or bad, you are not to think about them in that moment. You are to stay focussed on the specific Dhamma-related subject: your mind is fully aware.

For instance, when reciting ‘Buddho’, you are only to have the word ‘Buddho’ on your mind. Just keep reciting it without saying it out loud. Once you manage to focus your mind on ‘Buddho’, it will soon enough calm down and become absorbed into one-pointedness (*ekaggatārammaṇa*). Your mind will only be aware: it will not attend to other senses that come through your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. Your mind will not be interested in them even though it may not be completely void of such sensations. Your mind will just not be interested in anything in that moment; it will be still and at ease with calm and peace.

This is the kind of happiness that the Buddha and his noble disciples guided you towards, because such happiness can always be found within you. It is the kind of happiness that you can always keep with you, i.e., forever if you have the diligence and effort to practise.

In order to keep your mind calm and at ease, you must first maintain your mindfulness. Your mindfulness is what controls your mind from going astray to thinking about other things, which are unnecessary to your well-being. If you are to think, you'll only think about things that are necessary: what's on today's to-do list? Once you know them, you'll stop thinking and then turn your attention to the present, that is, focussing your mind on your body and the movement of your body. You need to be mindful of all the changes in your postures: standing, walking, sitting, and lying down.

You need to constantly observe your body. You also need to continually watch your mental proliferations, or your thoughts: what is it that you are thinking about? If you're thinking about unskilful things, you can stop it by focussing your mind on your mental state with the use of a meditation subject that you're used to. If you're used to reciting 'Buddho', then just keep reciting it in whichever posture—be it standing, walking, sitting, or lying down—and with whatever you do. Just keep on reciting 'Buddho' if there's no need for you to think. Your mind won't proliferate as much if you do so. It won't conjure all the various emotions. All sorts of discontents or emotions that occur in your mind are due to your mental fabrication.

If you let your mind wander with things that you come across, it will waver. When you see something not to your liking, you'll

then be irritated. When you see something pleasing, you'll get happy and excited, giving rise to craving. With craving, you'll become anxious and obsessed with obtaining whatever it is that you want. Once you have it, you'll continue being anxious and struggle to hold onto it. So there's no room for your mind to be calm and at ease, because your mind is constantly dealing with things that come through all the five senses.

However, with mindfulness, when you come into contact with sensual stimuli—when forms come into contact with your eyes or when sounds come into contact with your ears—they will quickly dissipate. Being mindful will allow your mind to simply acknowledge these stimuli for what they are. Your mind will be aware that these stimuli are not permanent: they come and go. Sounds come into contact with your ears and then they dissipate; no emotions need to be conjured up. It has nothing to do with the sounds, be they good or bad. It all comes down to your mind, which lets them affect you. The same sound may come across as melodious to one person, but piercing to another.

For instance, a parent's compliment to a child may bring joy to the one getting the compliment, but tears to the one not getting it. Two people can hear the same thing and feel completely different about it and have very different reactions. This is all due to the lack of mindfulness while listening—to listen without the guidance of wisdom, but under the

influence of emotions, delusions and the sense of self (*attā*). When someone else gets a compliment and you don't, you feel slighted and hurt.

But if you listen to it with mindfulness, you'll realise that it is simply sounds that are being uttered by someone else. How can they possibly make you a good or a bad person? Goodness or evil is not a result of someone else's utterance but your own actions. If you do good deeds, you're a good person with or without someone else's praise. If you do bad deeds, someone else's compliment or praise will not make you a good person in any way, although you might get excited and carried away, forgetting that you've just done a bad deed.

This is an indication of a mind that is without mindfulness—being carried away by craving, pleasure, passion, and aversion. You get happy and excited when you hear something to your liking. And when it is not, you get upset, frustrated, and unhappy.

But if you learn about the Dhamma and practise according to the Buddha's teaching, you can be sure that your mind will remain equanimous with whatever you hear. Your mind will not react to either praise or criticism. To listen with mindfulness, under the guidance of wisdom, you'll see it for what it is—sounds are just simply sounds.

If you don't make anything out of it—to interpret it, to burden yourself with it, and to hold onto it—then it will just be uttered sounds that shall pass. When you don't cling onto it and let it concern you, then there's no worry. For example, when people swear and curse while you happen to be present, if you hear it but don't think that it is directed at you, then you won't feel anything. But you'll get upset if you think that it has to do with you.

In the Dhamma way, the Buddha taught us: to simply listen, only so that we know or are aware, but not to burden ourselves. That is, don't let your ego get carried away and upset you. Only let your mind—the perceiver—be aware. Your mind is the perceiver; it is not you or your self. Simply be aware and then let go. Simply acknowledge that a sound arises and dissipates. This is how to be aware by the definition of Dhamma—being aware with a sense of wisdom.

To be aware with a sense of delusion is to be aware with a sense of self, that is, your ego takes a lead: if it is a praise, then you get elated. If it is a criticism, then you get angry. This is all because of being under the influence of delusion while listening. You let your ego take charge and when you let that happen, what follows is *dukkha*—the sense of discontent and dis-ease.

But if you don't let your ego get in the way and stick to the Dhamma, or the truth—knowing that your mind is not you or your self, but solely a perceiver—you'll just listen to whatever other people say. It is like this microphone: it receives and transmits whatever is being said to an amplifier, and then to a speaker. The microphone, itself, never complains nor comments whether what being said is good or bad. It only processes the sound and then lets go. The microphone receives and transmits the sound, letting it pass and dissipate.

All the sounds that we hear and listen to are just the same. It doesn't matter who or how they may say it. Once uttered—being processed through your ears and acknowledged by your mind, what has been said is simply gone. If you're mindful and wise, you'll let it go and not burden yourself with it. Whether it is a praise or criticism, you'll just be aware that it is sounds that arise, exist, and then cease to be. That's all there is to it. If you'd like to pay attention to the content of what is being said, you'll listen to it with discretion and wisdom to simply discern whether what they say is true or not. If it is true and beneficial, then use it for further good.

Just like the Dhamma that we've listened to today, you should use your wisdom to consider what you've heard and see whether it is beneficial to you or not. If it is not, then just let it in one ear and out the other. If it is, then contemplating it and putting it to

use will benefit you. This is how to listen with discretion—under the guidance of mindfulness, wisdom, and Dhamma, and not under the influence of emotions.

To listen with emotions—letting your ego take charge—you'll get upset immediately because what is being said offends your ego, even though what someone says may be something beneficial, worthwhile, and true. For example, they may criticise you for misbehaving—being lazy, drinking, and gambling. You don't see that they're cautioning you and pointing you towards the right direction. Having your drawbacks pointed out can help you improve yourself if you acknowledge that it is true. You can turn your laziness into diligence and stop drinking and gambling, which will benefit you. You should, therefore, listen with mindfulness, with a sense of wisdom, for the happiness and success that will follow. I would like to end this talk, as it seems appropriate, considering the time.









# *Chapter 2*

## *Essence of Buddhism*

*26 March 2016*

**B**lessings to all of you who are full of loving-kindness and generosity. Today is Saturday, March 26, 2016. Being free from other obligations, you have chosen to come here to make merit, to keep your precepts, and to listen to the Dhamma. It is an opportunity for you to gain some knowledge and insights and to put them to use towards your own well-being and happiness. In particular, it is for you to learn more about Buddhism—something that Buddhists should but don't usually know and understand fully due to a lack of genuine interest. And so many people end up being duped and misled to do things that aren't truly beneficial, leaving out things that are useful and wholesome.

Buddhism is like a fruit, which has two main components: skin and flesh. So do you eat its flesh or its skin? For instance, to have an orange, you have to peel off its skin and only consume its flesh. This is because there is no point in consuming its skin, which is tasteless and not as nutritious as the orange's flesh.

Buddhism also has two components: essential and non-essential aspects, or the core and its shell. So what is the shell of Buddhism? These non-essential aspects are any materialistic things, such as shrine halls (*uposathas*), stupas (*chedis*), huts (*kuṭīs*), halls (*sālās*),

and abodes (*vihāras*). They are all just the shell of Buddhism. But the core of Buddhism is the Buddha's teachings, which are called '*sāsana-dhamma*'. That is the essence of Buddhism. Kuṭis, sālās, uposathas, chedis, and other religious objects are just the shell or exterior, to which you shouldn't pay attention.

When the Buddha first propounded his teachings, there wasn't any of these religious objects and materialistic things. There was solely the dissemination of the Dhamma, or his teachings. It all and only had to do with teaching and learning, practices, and liberation.

There were countless noble disciples (*arahants*) in those days, but there's hardly any these days. There are only all these religious objects and structures now, as opposed to hardly any then—there was no uposatha, chedi, nor kuṭi. Monks lived under a tree, on a cliff, or in a cave, any abandoned places, a cemetery, and a forest. All these places help foster the core of Buddhism. That's why during the Buddha's time, there were only the true essence of Buddhism and hardly any frills.

Contrary to those days, people now pay too much attention to the non-essential aspects of Buddhism while ignoring the heart of it all. This hollows out Buddhism while leaving it with many issues, because there is no guiding light of the Dhamma to help show what is right or wrong, what is good or bad, and what is appropriate or inappropriate.

Today's version of Buddhism is like a hollow fruit: there is no flesh inside to consume beyond its inedible skin. The religious objects and sacred items cannot cure sufferings in your heart, nor can they liberate you from the endless cycle of death and rebirth; only the Buddha's teachings can. It's similar to how the body can only benefit from the flesh, and not from the skin of a fruit. With just frills, or the non-essential aspects of Buddhism, the mind will only be full of craving, discontentment, and agitation.

You all need to understand and be aware that the essential part, or the core, of Buddhism lies in the teachings of the Buddha. In order for you to seek and find refuge in his Dhamma, it all depends on studying and learning about the Dhamma. This is for the sake of your heart and mind, for the cure of your sufferings, and for the cultivation of your own peace and happiness. You should put what you've learnt into practice. And with practice, you'll find liberation—attaining the Eye of the Dhamma while instilling the Dhamma in your heart.

All the non-essential aspects of the Dhamma—those on its exterior—are not useful; only those that lie in the practitioner's heart can be truly worthwhile. It's like any medication: no matter how effective it may be, it cannot cure an ailment if not taken. One has to take the medicine in order for it to cure the inside.

No matter how wonderful the Buddha's teachings may be, they cannot cure the suffering and agitation in your heart if you don't truly appreciate and cannot penetrate them. Neither can they free you from the endless cycle of death and rebirth nor gain you access to the blissful state of enlightenment.

Learning about and putting the Buddha's teachings into practice will allow you to achieve various levels of attainment, from that of the stream-enterer's (*sotāpanna*), to those of the once-returner's (*sakadāgāmi*), non-returner's (*anāgāmi*), and arahant's, respectively. These attainments can only be achieved through learning about the Buddha's teachings and putting them into practice. This is what Buddhists should pay attention to and deem important.

I am not forbidding those who partake in creating all these religious objects and materialistic things, but you need to prioritise studying, practising, and attaining liberation before them. All these objects are only of use to your body. For instance, a kuṭi only enables a monk or a novice to live comfortably by providing shelter from wind and weather. An uposatha or a sālā allows people to gather together and carry out religious functions, such as ordination, Dhamma talk, and various offerings. It is convenient to have a sālā, but one can still manage without it. People can sit outdoors while carrying out these functions, providing that there's no rain. That was often the case during the

Buddha's time. He lived in and with nature. An uposatha then was not like the ones we have these days; people simply marked up the boundaries between trees and whatnot.

The term 'uposatha' refers to a place where monks can carry out their functions and meetings. There is no need to build something grand out of bricks and mortar or lots of money. I won't condemn those who wish to; in fact, you can have my blessing. But I would like to point out to you that these things are not nearly as important as studying, practising, and attaining liberation through the Buddha's Dhamma. For they are the flesh and blood that feed your soul—a refuge for your heart and mind.

All these materials and structures only serve as a refuge for your physical body. For example, a *sālā* provides shelter for people to carry out activities without any concern for weather conditions. But if there's no *sālā*, people can still make do with what is available. If it rains, people can just leave and go home. And if it doesn't, they can carry on with making merit, offering alms, and listening to the Dhamma. These structures are not that important. You shouldn't deem them so to the point where you forget about the essence of Buddhism.

It's not unlike peeling an orange to eat its skin while throwing away its flesh, which would be very unwise. The wise thing to do would be to consume its flesh while discarding its peel; it is

something that those who wish to pursue and acquire more about Buddhism should do. They shouldn't give too much importance to all the permanent objects and structures, that is, to the extent where they forget about the essence of Buddhism—studying and practising the Dhamma, and attaining liberation through practice.

Reaching levels of attainment would allow you to rid yourself of future births accordingly. Achieving the level of sotāpanna—the first level, there will be at most only seven more times of rebirth before attaining enlightenment (*nibbāna*). Gaining the level of sakadāgāmi—the second level, there will be at most only one more rebirth. Those who attain the level of anāgāmi—the third level—will no longer be reborn as humans; their rebirth will instead take place in the heavenly realm of pure abode (*brahmā*). And in attaining arahantship—the fourth level, they will gain enlightenment and no longer be in the perpetual cycles of death and rebirth.

These are the results that can be expected from studying, practising, and attaining liberation through the Dhamma. Building uposathas, chedis, vihāras, and other things only provide you with places to hold various religious functions, such as ordination, offerings of *kaṭhina* and others, and so on. All these functions can still be carried out with or without these structures.

During the Buddha's time, there was no uposatha for these ceremonies. The Buddha just made do with wherever was convenient and served the purpose. There was no uposatha when he gave his teachings. And there wasn't an uposatha when his 1,250 noble disciples congregated on *Māgha-pujā*. During those early days, nobody offered the Buddha an uposatha or a chedi. He never went around asking for it from his lay devotees. He only travelled around to give his teachings to those who were interested and wished to be liberated from all sufferings.

This is the goal of Buddhism: to help liberate all sentient beings from the endless cycles of death and rebirth. That's all there is to it. It has nothing to do with encouraging people to build things while expecting wealth in return. No matter how wealthy you may get, you will eventually have to age, get ill, and die. After death, you'll then be reborn and subjected to ageing, illnesses, and death again. Gaining wealth is not the reason for teaching people to give (*dāna*) and make merit (*puñña*). The purpose of teaching people to do so is for them to quell their spending habits of purchasing things and seeking pleasures.

Why do you want to be rich? It's because you want to buy and do things according to your wishes. The more you indulge your craving and desire (*kilesa-taṇhā*), the more rebirths you'll create for yourself. For it is your craving and desire that will lead you to being reborn and subjected to ageing, illnesses, and death again and again.

The Buddha, therefore, taught us to donate all the money that we don't need for taking care of our bodies. Don't keep or hang onto it as it will turn into means of your craving and desire. Spending to indulge your craving and desire is nothing more than buying yourself more future rebirths. It does not, in any way, cut down your future rebirths.

The way to curb your future rebirths (*bhava-jāti*) is to make merit with the money that you would have otherwise spent on your cravings. Having made merit will allow you to curb your spending on your cravings, and so there will be less future rebirths. For it is your craving and desire that will subject you to rebirths. When there is craving, then there is a need for a physical body—to see, there must be eyes; to hear, there must be ears; to eat, there must be a mouth; to drink, there must also be a mouth; and to sleep with someone, there must be a body. If you still have these cravings, you will need to look for a new body after death—to be reborn. Having been reborn, you will then give in to your craving again.

You didn't really need anyone to teach you to act according to your cravings, did you? Did your parents have to teach you to indulge your craving in a certain way? You didn't need to be taught. It was automatic: you crave to have and eat things as soon as they come into sight. It is something that came with your mind—the very thing that brought the mind to seek a new body

in the first place. With the new body, there will also be ageing, illnesses, and death as well as sufferings again.

This is the craving of which the Buddha taught us to rid ourselves—to give away the money that would otherwise be spent on your cravings. Spending your money on offerings, for instance, just as you've done today, is to overcome your cravings through merit-making. Don't make merit for the sake of gaining wealth. For example, some people may offer alms and make merit on the day that a lottery winning is announced just so that they might win some prizes to indulge themselves. This would only add more future rebirths and perpetuate the endless cycles of ageing, illnesses, and death, which is not the right purpose of merit-making.

To make merit is so that you won't have the means to indulge your own craving and desire. Any savings is to be spent on what is necessary. Spending money on the necessities is not considered indulging your cravings, for instance, spending on food, clothes, shelter, and medicine. They are all basic necessities for which one must save some money.

Don't spend money on new handbags and shoes if you already have quite a few of them. But if they're worn out or somehow lost, you may then buy new ones out of real need and not craving. However, if your closet is already full of clothes and you still want

to buy new ones, that's considered piling on more sufferings and future rebirths.

It is better to spend your money on merit-making. You can make donations to monks and monasteries, to hospitals and schools, to the poor and the elderly, to the ill and the disabled, or even to animals. You can free some fish and birds, or even help stray cats and dogs. Just make sure to spend your money for the good of others. And don't use it to indulge your own cravings.

This is the right intention and the purpose of making merit: to quell any possibility of indulging one's craving and desire. Without money, you cannot act on your cravings. You cannot go out even if you want to, so you end up staying at home, allowing you to keep your precepts, to meditate, and to calm your mind. This is what the Buddha had in mind: for laypeople to quit their spending habits. There is no need to earn or make a lot of money if one doesn't spend unnecessarily. So then there is time to put into practising, studying, and listening to the Dhamma for the sake of attainment and liberation. If you get caught up with spending, you then have to keep earning and end up having no time to listen to the Dhamma and to cultivate your practice to achieve enlightenment.

When it comes to Buddhism, there's mostly just the shell these days; that is, its core is rather obscure. You can hardly find

someone who has attained enlightenment, which is unlike during the Buddha's time. You couldn't help but walk into noble disciples (*arahants*) then while being unable to find any uposatha, chedi, and kuṭi. It was completely the opposite to these days. This is because our minds are completely in reverse. Instead of the right view (*sammā-ditṭhi*), people have the wrong view (*micchā-ditṭhi*)—they mistake things. They take all these religious objects as the essence of Buddhism while regarding its teachings as frills. People aren't really interested in contributing to monks' education but they're so eager to give donations to chanting at funerals. People make offerings for monks' chanting but not for their studies. With no money for studying expenses, there is, in effect, no real support for monks' education and practice. They only focus on the non-essential aspects: making merit for wealth, for good fortune, and for avoiding mishaps. No matter how much merit you make, you cannot rid yourself of misfortune, because it is not what merit-making is for.

Merit-making and giving are to help eliminate one's cravings. Out of ignorance, people resort to making offerings to monks to deal with vicissitudes. They invite monks for meals and chanting in hopes of turning their luck around. Monks, in turn, get used to the idea of giving in to laypeople's requests and invitations for the sake of money, whereas studying and practising the Dhamma don't provide them with monetary gains.

If you go to any forest-tradition monasteries where they focus on Dhamma practice, you'll see that monks and novices are not allowed to keep any money. Handling money themselves will subject them to cravings just like laypeople. They'll suddenly want to have different gadgets and make trips to different places. They won't have any Dhamma to teach people during their travels because they have yet to practise and attain anything for themselves. Their trips would be only for the sake of pleasure while claiming otherwise, thus ending up spreading the misconceived notion of merit-making, offerings, and chanting. They chant and accept money wherever they go. And so people don't really care for funding monks to study and support their practice. Monks and novices, as a result, don't feel encouraged to do so.

This is all to do with the wrong view. We really are at the time where *michā-ditṭhi* prevails. Despite being Buddhists, people have no idea what is essential and what isn't. They pay attention to the non-essential aspects out of their own delusions. They think that making merit, giving, inviting monks to chant and bless them would make them wealthy and keep them safe from harm, which isn't the case.

Practising the Dhamma, or calming your mind, is what will protect you. When your mind is calm, you won't commit any sin or unwholesome acts. You keep doing bad deeds because

your mind isn't at peace. Your mind is being conjured by your craving and desire and so it has to act according to them.

If you want money to spend, you have to earn it somehow. If you can't earn it through rightful means, you might resort to illegal ones: dealing drugs and doing unwholesome professions. This is all because your mind is agitated, thus not quelling but fuelling your cravings instead. It is exactly why our country and society are in chaos nowadays: there is no Dhamma in people's hearts to help them find the real happiness.

You have no clue about how or where to find the real happiness despite its ever presence. You are fooled by your own delusion. You expect wealth, prestige, and praise to bring you happiness. You believe that happiness can be found in forms, sounds, odours, and flavours. So you seek out and strive for these things. But no matter how much you've managed to acquire them, they're never quite enough—you're still unsatisfied. It's like you haven't eaten anything, or it's simply not filling. You constantly have to keep finding and eating more food. Even if you had a million or a billion, you'd still keep wanting and looking for more. You just haven't found the real happiness.

The real happiness lies in your own sense of contentment. If you haven't sensed it, you have yet to find the real happiness. Once you've experienced it, that's when you become truly well-off. The

Buddha and his noble disciples are the ones that have attained such contentment. Having found that sense of contentment, they no longer long for wealth, prestige, and praise like you all do.

Take the Buddha for example. How did he live? He lived under a tree. How did his noble disciples live? They lived on a cliff, in abandoned places, and in a forest. It is completely in contrast to your houses and villas, which are fully equipped with all the pleasures and amenities. But how is your mind? Is it calm or agitated? This is all because you're indulging your kilesa-taṇhā. They are the fuel that feeds the fire in your heart and mind. The more you succumb to them, the more insatiable these craving and desire become, thus causing you more grief.

If you really want to be at ease and have a calm mind, you have to fulfil your heart and mind by getting rid of your craving and desire and not the opposite. You have to fight and not give in to them. If you want to go out, then you have to resist not to. If you have an urge to spend and splurge on things, you have to fight against it in order to learn how to live in moderation just like the Buddha. This is your means to fight against your craving and desire.

The Buddha said: the more you desire for something, the less you should aim for it. To be content with just how it is. Don't

be fussy and picky. It will only leave you more unsatisfied. You'll easily get bored with whatever you get and end up craving for more or for other things. It's all the same really. Whatever you feed yourself will fill you up. There's no need to be picky about the types of food and whatnot. Whatever you eat will fill you. If you're particular about your food, you will get upset when you can't have what you want. Instead of being at ease, you end up suffering for the sake of your body. The body doesn't care about its intake as long as it's being replenished. It's the mind that gets upset with the food that is not to its liking. This is despite the fact that the mind doesn't actually consume the food, but the body does. The mind suffers needlessly because of the body, by not getting something to its liking.

This is all to do with your craving and desire. They only agitate your mind endlessly due to some dissatisfaction and discontentment. You have to fight your craving and desire by not giving in to them. If your craving is being overly demanding when it comes to eating, then just eat like monks do. Put everything together in a bowl and mix it, just like how you would feed your dog. Your body is not different from a dog. It can eat anything; it has no idea what is being consumed. It is your mind that is aware, although it is not the one that eats. Your body is the one that consumes, but your mind gets all involved with the body intake.

That's why the Buddha taught monks to eat from their alms bowl. Eating off an alms bowl is to put and mix together all the foods that you'll eat, just like how they'll end up in your stomach. That's how to curb your craving and desire. You'll no longer be picky if you eat in such a way. You'll be at ease and able to consume whatever is available. You'll get upset if you don't get to have what you crave for. But if there's no craving for any food in particular, then you won't feel a thing, being able to eat whatever is available.

This is how you will find happiness. You have to learn about the Buddha's teachings and put them into practice. With practice, you'll eventually be able to reduce and eliminate your greed, hatred, and delusion along with other desires. The less kilesa there is, the calmer the mind will be, thus less suffering. With less suffering, there will be more happiness. When there's no kilesa, there is then no suffering. The mind will be full of joy and happiness, just like the heart of the Buddha's and those of his noble disciples'. They've all relinquished all the kilesas from their hearts and minds. That is why they have experienced the ultimate bliss—*paramam sukham*. There is absolutely no suffering for the Buddha and his noble disciples because they have eradicated its cause: all the defilements.

This is the essence of Buddhism that you all should take in. Don't focus on the non-essential aspects. Don't get caught up

with building uposathas and chedis. Any construction projects involve soliciting money, so why bother building them? Why don't people build retreat centres for Dhamma practice or learning centres for Dhamma study? It's much better to promote study and practice to attain enlightenment as your mind will be full of happiness and liberated from suffering.

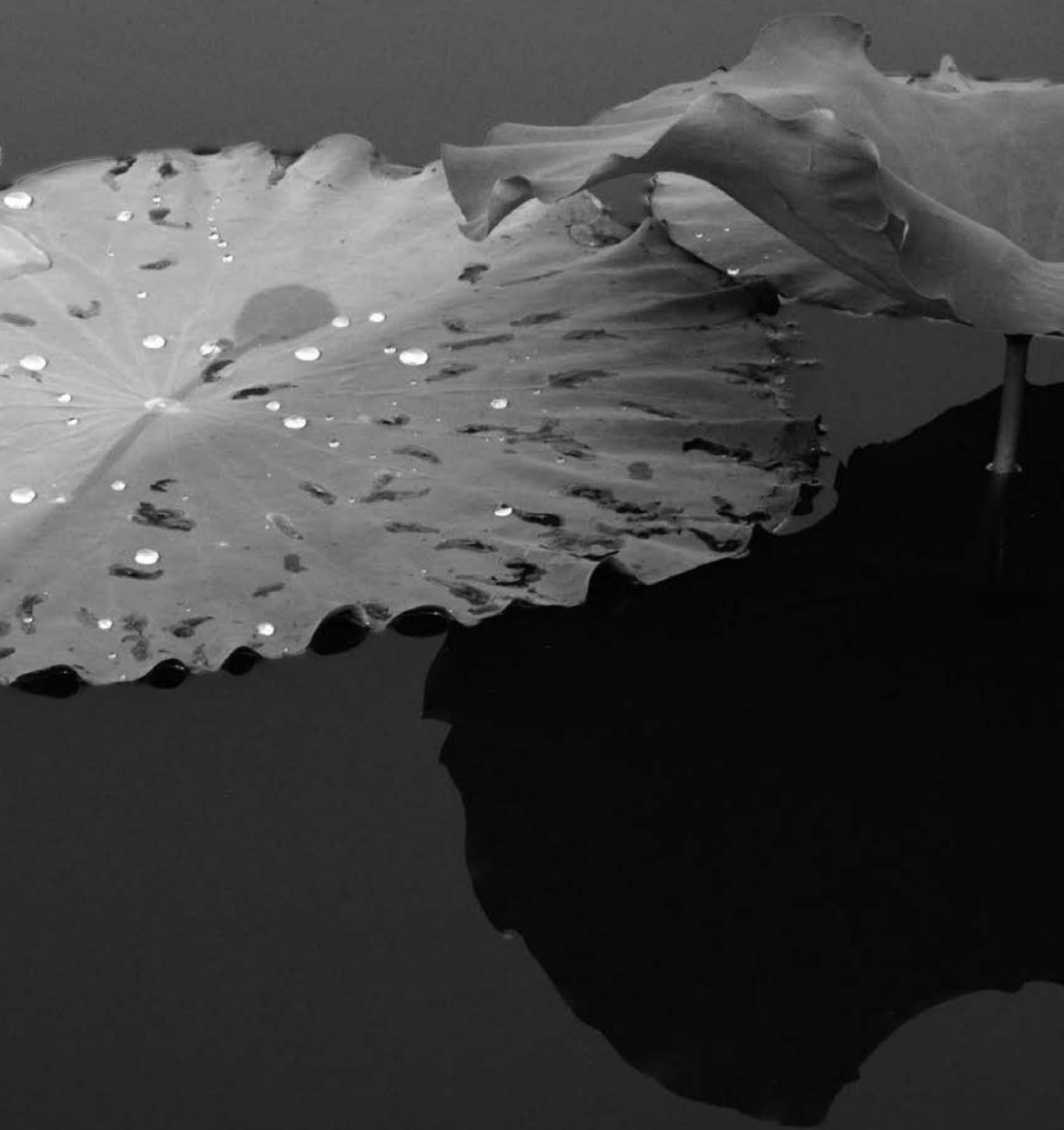
This is what you'll learn about Buddhism if you listen to Dhamma talks and study the Buddha's teachings and the history of Buddhism. You'll gain the right view—*sammā-diṭṭhi*—and know what is essential and what isn't. And so you'll truly benefit from Buddhism.

I'd like to end the talk here as it seems appropriate.











# *Chapter 3*

## *Purpose of ordination*

*14 May 2016*

**B**lessings to all of you who have faith and conviction in Buddhism. Today is Saturday, May 14, 2016. It is a special day due to the ordination of soon-to-be monks who intend to learn about and practise the Dhamma here at Wat Yansangwararam.

The monastery occasionally provides a group ordination for a number of candidates who wish to ordain on the same day to save the ordinator, who lives in Bangkok, time and hassle. There will likely be two more ordinations from now until the beginning of the rains retreat (*vassa*)—one in June and another one in July just before the vassa. It is a period during which many people with faith in Buddhism wish to ordain, committing to the rains retreat for the sake of Dhamma study and practice, as per our Thai tradition and culture.

These days people tend to ordain in order to repay the debt of gratitude to their parents. They ordain to study, get a taste of the Dhamma, and then disrobe to carry on with their careers and livelihood. They go on to live a lay life with moral virtues and precepts. Such is the case with most people who ordain.

However, there is another kind of ordination: a kind with no intention of disrobing—one with the intent of learning and practising the Dhamma in order to liberate oneself from the insufferable cycle of death and rebirth. It is the kind of the Buddha's—one which prevailed during his time. During that time, or in the very beginning, people wished to ordain after having listened to the Buddha's teachings. His Dhamma helped them to readily attain enlightenment (*nibbāna*) and become his noble disciples (*arahants*). With their arahantship, they sought the Buddha's permission to ordain to be at his service in disseminating his noble teachings to other sentient beings.

That's what to ordain entailed in the early days of Buddhism. Whenever the Buddha preached to those who had yet heard of his teachings, they managed to put his teachings into practice after listening, to the point where they no longer had any craving and desire (*kilesa-taṇhā*). Having eradicated all discontentment (*dukkha*) in their hearts, they no longer saw the point of leading a lay life. A layperson's lifestyle is driven by the will of craving and desire; they are the ones in charge when it comes to the lay life. It is a kind of lifestyle that relies on one's physical body—seeking pleasures through one's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. It is a kind of happiness that is laden with suffering—fleeting and impermanent. You become unhappy and discontent whenever you cannot obtain such bodily pleasures.

Those who are wise will see the drawbacks of seeking pleasures in laypeople's sense. Listening to the Buddha's Dhamma allows them to rid themselves of greed, hatred, delusions, and other cravings from their hearts. Consequently, their minds no longer require their bodies as means to seek pleasures by laypeople's definition. They've attained a higher form of happiness, a kind that comes from having relinquished craving and desire from their hearts. It is a kind of happiness that derives from a sense of calm and ease—one that is far superior to any other kinds.

You'd not care to lead a lay life from having found such happiness, because you no longer want to experience all the sufferings. You'd prefer to live as a monastic, ridding yourself of defilements and being content and at ease without relying on any source of pleasure. You'd only require a sense of peace and calm—something that is permanent and stays true in your heart perpetually. Such is contrary to forms, sounds, odours, and tastes, and very much unlike fortune, prestige, and praise—for they are bound to decline and deplete eventually.

Those who still choose a lay life, seeking the sensual kind of happiness, will inevitably and endlessly be subjected to suffering; the subjection is not only in this lifetime. Your longing for sensual pleasures (through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body) doesn't die with your body because it is in your heart. It will lead you to be reborn—to have a new physical body in order to seek those

sensual pleasures again, thus being subjected to discontentment whenever those sensual desires are not met.

Such is the path for laypeople who continually seek pleasures through their physical bodies. When your current body ceases to be, you will return to look for a new body: to be reborn; to repeat the cycle of ageing, getting ill, and dying; and to suffer from being parted from your loved ones all over again. This is all because of your own ignorance about the harm of seeking pleasures in lay life. You don't realise that these pleasures are, in fact, sufferings and the very cause of your endless cycle of death and rebirth.

It is rare that a wise person, like the Buddha, would be born and manage to discern the harm of seeking sensual pleasures through the physical body. He resolved to relinquish such pleasures, which are constantly bounded by suffering, and to seek out a kind of happiness that is independent of one's physical body. It is a kind of happiness that does not rely on eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. He eventually found a kind of happiness that is permanent—the peace and calm of the mind. This sense of serenity can be achieved through eliminating causes that are in the way of such peace and happiness.

The main deterrent of one's mental calm is their own craving and desire (*kilesa-taṇhā*). For instance, at this very moment

your mind may be calm, which allows you to sit still. But soon enough a craving will arise and urge you to get up. As soon as such craving arises, you can no longer sit still. You might start to feel aches and pains here and there. Your *kilesa-taṇhā* will signal you to rid yourself of the discomfort by saying that you've already sat for too long and that you shouldn't subject yourself to unnecessary pain. That is just how craving and desire operate: without your being aware of their taking over.

Those without craving and desire can sit still despite the pain. It is because they don't have any desire to rid themselves of the pain. They know full well that they simply cannot avoid such pain and discomfort. Relieving themselves of the pain in one spot would only allow the pain to occur in another spot, and so they don't avoid or run away from it. Not shying away from it allows them to embrace and overcome it. Their minds calm down when they no longer seek to avoid such pain—their minds are not affected by it.

This is the way of the Buddha. His way of seeking pleasures and happiness is to fight against the physical pain—not seeking sensual pleasures, letting the body be, and enduring the physical pain and suffering. The mind, however, remains focussed and resolute—calm and content. It no longer relies on the body.

That is how it was to be ordained during the Buddha's time. To ordain is to be free from the grip and rein of craving and desire; they constantly drive you to seek sensual pleasures through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body while running away from any physical pain. But there will be a time when these physical pains and illnesses are unavoidable—no medication will be able to relieve you from suffering and no cure will be able to save you from dying. That's when you will suffer in living a lay life. That's why people don't appreciate ageing, illnesses, and death; it's because they don't know how to handle them. They only want to escape ageing, sickness, and death when confronted. In wanting to avoid them, they experience suffering and suffer even more by not being able to do so.

This is what the Buddha pursued in order to no longer be subjected to ageing, illnesses, and death—to no longer suffer from them. He did it by keeping his mind focussed and calm, or equanimous. When your mind is calm, it won't be affected by ageing, illnesses, and death; neither will it be upset by the loss of things you cherish. This is what you don't yet know how to put into effect and the very reason why you always end up in tears. You cry when you encounter something you don't like. You shed tears when you lose things that you love. This is all because you don't know how to control your mind. If you know how and manage to keep your mind calm, there will only be contentment. You'll be at ease regardless of what you encounter, be it positive

or negative. You won't be troubled or agitated; there will be no grief or tears.

This is what you are lacking still—you still experience sufferings and endure them continually. And it is exactly why you come here—to look for ways to handle whatever happens and make yourself less inclined to be affected by it. The only way to alleviate your suffering after having done your research is to put it into practice. In order to fully benefit from, and commit to, your practice is to ordain and lead a monastic life.

For those who choose to ordain, their ultimate goal is to pacify their minds, that is, to remain mentally calm regardless of the situation. If you can constantly keep your mind calm, you won't be bothered or troubled by any type of situation, be it a decline in fortune, prestige, and praise, or in health through ageing, illnesses, and death. You won't feel a thing or be affected at all, just like being shot while wearing a bullet-proof vest. You won't feel anything because the bullet is being stopped by the vest from penetrating your body.

Dhamma practice, or training the mind to be calm, will be the safeguard of your mind. It will prevent your mind from wavering—from being shaken, afraid, and worried—and grieving due to various circumstances in the future. This is what the Buddha discovered and attained in terms of enlightenment. Once he taught those who were ignorant, they developed faith and confidence in him and

put his teachings into practice. Doing so allowed them to develop the protection for their own minds, preventing them from being affected by various causes and conditions, and so they no longer felt inclined to lead a lay life.

Living a lay life is not unlike being in the midst of fire. How can you find ease and calm under such circumstances? There is only anguish that is fuelled by greed, anger, and delusion. But you don't know how to put it out. Instead of tipping the water onto the fire, you add more fuel to it. It might seem initially that the fuel would douse the fire when it was first added, but it only got compounded once the fuel had been ignited.

That's how those who don't have the proper know-how would cure their suffering. When they feel that sense of suffering, which arises from their longing for something, they would act according to their craving. Indulging their craving would temporarily suppress their sense of suffering. But soon enough it would re-emerge and only get exacerbated by not using the right means.

The way to cure one's suffering, or mental anguish, is to not indulge one's craving. When a craving arises, withdraw your mind from it with mindfulness. Keep reciting *'Buddho'*, for instance. Don't think about the things that you crave. Or don't think about the things that make you angry. The unsettling feeling will soon pass if you don't think about it.

This is the way of the Buddha. It is a permanent cure of any suffering. When you can resist your craving, it will eventually fade away. There is no point in craving for something when you know you cannot have it. But if you can get what you want, then you'll keep on craving for more.

If someone wants some money and you give it to them when they ask for it, they will soon enough come back and ask for more. But if you don't give them from the beginning, they won't come back and ask you again because they know they won't be able to get it from you. That's also how it is with craving. If you don't indulge your craving, it won't resurface, being aware that it won't be gratified.

For example, when you crave for some coffee, don't drink it. Try not to indulge yourself for a few times and your craving will soon dissipate. When you want to have some coffee, just tell yourself not to indulge. Every time you crave for it, just tell yourself 'no'. You'll soon no longer have any desire for it, knowing that there's no point in craving when you won't be gratified. You have to be resolute. You have to have the courage to fight against your craving if you no longer want to be subjected to anguish and suffering. For they only come from your very own craving and desire, and nothing else.

You may want someone to be or act in a certain way, and you feel insufferable when they don't. You get upset and cry. When they act according to your wish, you'll then want them to be something else. These craving and desire are endless: they only grow and keep on multiplying.

The way to cure them is to not give in to them. However certain people may be, just leave them be. Don't get involved with them; it is their business. You'd better work on putting an end to your own craving as you won't then be bothered by however they may be. The only reason you get upset with the way other people are is because you don't want them to be so. But if you have no desire for them to act in a certain way, whatever they do will not bother you. You will eventually not be involved with or care about them. You'll happily carry on with your own life.

This is what to ordain is about. You learn about the practice in the beginning in order for you to cure your mind from all of the craving and desire—from all sufferings to end the perpetual cycle of death and rebirth.

That's why the Buddha made it compulsory for those who ordain to stay with their teacher for at least five years—five rains retreats. It is not as if a monk could shortly leave after being ordained and set up his own monastery. If so, then that

is not for the sake of learning about the Dhamma but for the sake of preaching. They won't have anything to teach but only their own craving and desire. Wanting to teach other people is already a form of *kilesa-taṇhā* on its own.

The Buddha didn't actually want to teach anyone, but he did so out of good reasons because there was a need. Had he not begun teaching others, then no one would know. He didn't want to teach anyone when he first became enlightened. He thought that it'd be difficult for others to put his teachings into practice. For those who didn't care to rid themselves of craving and desire, they wouldn't heed and practise according to his teachings. The Buddha was initially discouraged and didn't want to teach anyone.

However, after having contemplated and discerned the various types of people—those who would and those wouldn't heed his words, he set out to teach those who would and leave out those who wouldn't. That's the teaching principle of the Buddha. He didn't set out to teach out of his own desire. Wanting to teach indicates one's desire to be a teacher or a mentor, to be well known, to have students and disciples, to be respected and honoured by others, and to be offered with things and etc. That's why one would want to become a teacher as nobody would pay respect to you if you're just a student.

People don't usually pay respect to those who are newly ordained. They're not convinced of the new monks' commitment. They do not know how long would these monks remain in robes or want to get disappointed. Therefore, they don't seek out these new monks for advice and teaching.

But these newly ordained monks have their ways these days. They know what to say and how to convince people by showing them their credentials. This is all to appeal to, and inspire those who have heard, to develop faith in them. But no one can prove whether or not what's being said is true due to the obligatory respect they have for those in robes. They think that monks are obliged to only tell the truth and so they get misled. There are those who quickly set themselves as teachers once they get ordained, but soon enough they have to disrobe due to unexpected incidents and disgraces.

This should be a cautionary tale for laypeople. You should carefully consider and be wary of those newly ordained monks who quickly assume themselves as teachers. It is better to seek out those monks who have thirty or forty-some years in robes. It's like an old saying: 'Only time can attest to one's character.' You cannot rely on someone's words; their claims are hardly a proof of anything. Only time will tell. If they've been monks for forty to fifty-some years, then it is likely that they're trustworthy.

This is what ordaining for the sake of learning entails. One has to study first after being ordained and keep on learning until one has penetrated the teachings and liberated oneself. Once certified, one can then go on to become a teacher. To be a teacher is not to advertise one's teachings—inviting people and making promises to them about liberation. There are laypeople as well as monks who do so through channels of communication, like Line. A layperson showed to me recently adverts about crash courses for liberation. Those who want to be liberated quickly just jump at them, because they don't want to put up with sitting in meditation and reciting 'Buddho'. They want something quick and easy—attaining something just from listening. If it were that easy, everyone would already be enlightened.

According to the Buddha, newly ordained monks are to stay with their teacher for at least five years. Should they want solitude after that period for the sake of privacy and quietness, they can do so and carry on practising until they reach enlightenment. Once they've attained liberation, they can then teach others. But there's no need to advertise yourself and attract others to come and learn from you. People would naturally tell others after having learnt and benefited from you.

There's no need for any kind of advertisement. Any advertisement is a sign of defilements. It shows that you still want to teach. If someone no longer has any defilement, I can assure you that they

wouldn't want to teach anyone. They only teach because they have to, as there are no other options. They cannot run away, being cornered into teaching, because people come and ask for them to teach. They don't gain anything from teaching others. They have no use of whatever fortune and prestige they might have gained from it. All these things are not comparable to the happiness that comes from having rid oneself of various craving and desire.

This is what Buddhism is about, what to ordain is about, and what to teach is about. Please take my words as precautions so that you can apply them properly in your practice for the sake of your own benefit and happiness. I would like to end this talk, as it seems appropriate, considering the time.

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# *Chapter 4*

## *Committing to a rains retreat*

*30 July 2015*

**W**e have now made a resolution to remain in this monastery throughout the next three months: not to stay overnight elsewhere except in cases of emergency. According to the disciplinary rules (*vinaya*), a monk is allowed to take leave to care for an ill parent or teacher for no more than seven days and seven nights. Exceeding this permissible leave period is considered breaking one's observance of rains retreat (*vassa*).

Breaking *vassa* means not being able to benefit from the five merits of committing to a rains retreat. For instance, you will not be able to receive a *kāṭhina* (festival at the end of *vassa*) cloth—only those who maintain their observance can receive the cloth. However, breaking *vassa* will not affect your period of ordination—the number of years you have been in robes. Such is an example of an exception that allows monks to be away with consent for seven days and seven nights.

To commit to a rains retreat, you need to be aware of the monastery grounds you are to remain in. Most monasteries have surrounding walls to mark their boundaries. But Wat Yansangwararam—being a part of His Majesty the King's Royal Project—is situated on a vast piece of land, so it is necessary to inform everyone of its boundaries.

Let's begin from the entrance of the monastery: the gate just before the roundabout is the starting point. The road that runs along the Geriatric Centre and the Agricultural Centre and leads to the Land Development section marks the boundary on one side. The monastery grounds also include the lodging area of Dhamma practitioners, His Majesty the King's residence, the Mondop hill, Khao Chi-On, and the Non-Hunting Wildlife Reserve area. From the Reserve area, the road that runs behind the monks' residence area and leads to the Sian Vihāra and loops back to the roundabout along the International Sālā marks the boundary on the other side. These are the monastery grounds you are to remain in during the rains retreat.

You are not allowed to leave the monastery grounds before dawn. Leaving the monastery grounds before dawn is considered breaking vassa. For example, if you were to go on your alms round before dawn and return once it's light, then it would be considered breaking vassa. However, if there's a reason for you to leave the monastery during the night and you're able to return before dawn, then it's not considered breaking your observance.

There are two ways to determine whether it is light. One is to look at leaves. If you can clearly see each leaf on a tree, then it's considered light. The other is to look at your palm lines. If you can clearly see your palm lines when your arm is fully extended, then it's considered light.

You can leave the monastery grounds if you have a duty to perform, such as going on an alms round. So, when you go on your alms round in the morning, you shouldn't have to bring your outer robe with you; otherwise, it would mean that it's not light yet. You should wait until you're able to leave behind your outer robe and then go on your alms round. If you were to leave before dawn and then return once it's light, then it would be considered breaking vassa.

This is a disciplinary matter that the Buddha laid down so that each of you has time to remain in one place to study and practise the Dhamma continually. The purpose of ordination is to learn Dhamma theory and the Buddha's teachings (*pariyatti*). This is so we know the right way to practise. Once we know the theory or method, we can then put it into practice (*paṭipatti*). When we've practised properly, a result from having penetrated the truth (*paṭivedha*) will arise. Together they form a triad of theory, practice, and attainment.

An attainment is a result of practice. And what is the result of the Buddhist practice? It is the four paths (*magga*), four fruits (*phala*), and one enlightenment (*nibbāna*). They are the goal—the result of ordination, Dhamma study, and proper practice—which is to be liberated from the cycles (*vaṭṭa*) of rebirth, ageing, illnesses, and death.

There are four levels of attainment. The first level is called *sotāpatti phala*, or the result of stream-entry. There will be at most only seven more times of rebirth before attaining nibbāna. Stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*) will not be reborn into the lower realms (*apāya-bhumi*)—anything lower than those of human and heavenly beings. The second level is that of once-returned (*sakadāgāmī*). There will be at most only one more rebirth. If once-returners were to be reborn, they would only be reborn one more time into the human realm. The third level is that of non-returner (*anāgāmī*). Non-returners will no longer be reborn as humans. They will instead be reborn into the heavenly realm of pure abode (*brahmā*) before attaining arahantship. If they practise to the level of arahant, they will no longer be in the perpetual cycles of rebirth and death, thus reaching enlightenment.

The Buddha referred to the practice towards these results as the four maggas, four phalas, and one nibbāna. Each level's path involves a cultivation of moral virtue (*sīla*), meditative absorption (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Sotāpannas must cultivate their level of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. Sakadāgāmīs must cultivate their level of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*; so is the same for anāgāmīs and arahants. Each of them uses *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* as means to achieve various levels of attainment.

In coming and remaining together during the rains retreat, your duty is to study at a preliminary stage. You must learn about the

Buddhist teachings and discipline (*Dhamma-Vinaya*) if you don't yet know what the path is, what the result is, and what the means of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* are for helping you reach various levels of results. During the rains retreat, Dhamma courses will be taught at an elementary level. There will be a course on Dhamma-Vinaya—the 227 Buddhist monastic rules. There will be an analytical course on Dhamma—various teachings of the Buddha as means to cultivate *samādhi* and *paññā*. There will be a course on the history of Buddhism for learning about the life of the Buddha. It is to help eliminate certain doubts: Did the Buddha really exist? Are his teachings real and accurate? Did his noble disciples really exist?

Who are the noble disciples? They are those with faith just like you. With faith, they sought to learn about Dhamma and teachings of the Buddha, and then applied his teachings in the form of practice. If you want and manage to practise correctly just as you chant to recollect the Saṅgha's qualities, '*Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho. Uju-paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho. Ñāya-paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho. Sāmī-cipaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho*', you will then attain the four paths and their results respectively. You will reach the level of *sotāpanna*, and then move on to that of *sakadāgāmī*, of *anāgāmī*, and of *arahant*. This is your duty. The duty of a monk is to study, to practise, and to attain enlightenment.

It is not your duty to build permanent structures and objects or to raise funds to build such things. The Buddha left those affairs to lay devotees and their faith, for they are the ones with financial means to build shrine halls (*uposatha*), stupas (*chedis*), huts (*kuṭṭis*), halls (*sālās*), and so on. For monks like us, the ones without money, it is not our duty to build such things. When the Buddha was still alive, he never built a temple, not even one. Each temple was established as a result of lay devotees' faith in, and admiration for, the Buddha. They wished to provide the Buddha and monks with dwellings and places to study, to practise and to attain enlightenment. Such is the duty of lay devotees—to build permanent structures and so on.

The duty of a monk is to cultivate *silā*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. *Samādhi* and *paññā*, in particular, are the most important. While you duly maintain the 227 precepts, *samādhi* and *paññā* require mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). *Samatha bhāvanā*, or the development of tranquility, is to cultivate *samādhi*. *Vipassanā bhāvanā*, or the development of insight, is to cultivate *paññā*.

*Samādhi* alone isn't enough to eradicate mental craving and desire. *Samādhi* is only able to suppress them. It's just like a rock on a patch of grass that prevents the grass from growing: the grass will continue to grow once the rock has been removed.

When the mind becomes concentrated and absorbed in calmness, your mental defilements (*kilesas*) and craving (*taṇhā*) will disappear. They will stop working for a while but not disappear permanently. Once you come out of samādhi, you will resume thinking about things, seeing things, and hearing things. Your craving and desire will reappear. If you want to eradicate your craving and desire for good, you will need to resort to paññā by practising vipassanā bhāvanā.

The development of insight is to be carried out once you've come out of samādhi. When the mind is in absorption, during which the mind is resting, it is not possible to cultivate wisdom. The mind recharges just like the body does. You cannot go out and work while you sleep, but once you have enough rest and get up, you can then resume working and doing things. The cultivation of wisdom is like the function of your body: it can only be carried out once you've come out of samādhi.

In leaving that calm absorption, you will need to contemplate your physical body. This is because you still misperceive your body and cling to it—you still suffer because of your body. You need to contemplate and see clearly: your body is impermanent—it is not who or what you are and it does not belong to you. Thinking that your body is you and yours will make you want it to be permanent and last forever. Once you have cravings, discontentment (*dukkha*) will then arise. You need to contemplate

in order to realise that your body is impermanent and not you or yours. Once you see it clearly, you won't have the desire for your body to last forever and not to change. It ought to change with time: having been born, your body will age, get ill, and die eventually. No one can prevent it. It's a matter of your physical body. Your physical body does not belong to you and is not who or what you are.

The Buddha taught us to identify and contemplate thirty-two parts of the body in order to see that the body is not who or what you are. The body consists of thirty-two parts, such as head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, spleen, heart, liver, membranes, kidneys, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, undigested food, faeces, and other bodily fluids.

The Buddha told us to contemplate each part on its own and consider whether we can truly identify ourselves with any of them. Is your head hair who or what you are? Is your body hair who or what you are? Are your nails, teeth, and skin who or what you are? You ought to identify each and every single part and contemplate whether any of them is who or what you are. Are you your head hair? Are you your body hair? By contemplating this way, you will see clearly that they are simply head hair, body hair, nails, and teeth and nothing more. It is, in fact, your delusion to think that head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, and bones are who or what you are and that they belong to you.

You need to train yourself to contemplate these bodily parts on a regular basis. You will come to realise that they are not who or what you are. You will see that your true self is merely the one who is contemplating and investigating. You are, in fact, the perceiver and the thinker who are contemplating your body. Your body is merely an object of contemplation, not who or what you are. If you can see it clearly, you will become detached from your body. There won't be any desire for your body not to age, get ill, and die. When there is no desire, there is no dukkha.

Ageing, illnesses, and death are not the causes of your dukkha. The cause of your discontentment is your craving—craving not to age, craving not to get ill, and craving not to die. You can see clearly that your body is inevitably subject to illnesses and death due to impermanence and selflessness. You cannot prevent illnesses and death from happening to your body and you cannot hold on to your body. If your physical body is truly yours, then it should be with you forever. If it doesn't last forever, how can you assume that it is yours? Looking at it rationally will give you courage to detach yourselves from your body.

You should seek and go to places that used to make you afraid of dying in order to see whether you are still attached to your body. If you don't consider your body as who or what you are and as yours, you will not care. No matter what happens to your body, you will be happy and prepared. It is as if your

body belongs to someone else, just as you aren't normally bothered when something happens to other people's body. This is a contemplation to eliminate any fear of illnesses and death. Illnesses are just the same: they are unpleasant sensations (*dukkha-vedanā*). They belong to your physical body, not you—you only come into contact with and acknowledge them. If you only perceive and acknowledge them and do not have any desire for them to go away, then you won't suffer.

Dukkha arises out of your desire for a physical pain to go away. You need to sit until it hurts to teach yourself that the pain belongs to your body, not you. You are simply the observer and the perceiver. You don't need to want it to go away because if there's craving, then there's dukkha. Your inability to tolerate the pain has nothing to do with the pain itself but your desire to be without it. There will be no dukkha if you don't wish for it to go away. You will then be able to live happily with the pain.

When you're ill and have no medication, you won't be bothered. If there are no painkillers, it is not a problem as most aches and pains have to do with your mind. If you have the wisdom to cure them by not desiring them to go away, most pain in your mind will disappear and only minor physical pain will remain. There is then no need to take painkillers. This is how to contemplate your physical body: to become detached from them so that you no longer suffer because of your body.

You are all heading towards old age, illnesses, and death. If you don't prepare yourself to handle them, you will not be able to face them without suffering. This is the goal of the cultivation of wisdom, or vipassanā bhāvanā. It is to see the truth—to see things as they are and not according to your thoughts and feelings.

Your thoughts and feelings arise from your delusion—from not knowing the truth. It makes us mistake things: to see things that are wrong or bad as right or good, to see things that are impermanent as permanent, to see things that are not who or what you are as you, and to see suffering as happiness (*sukha*). The cultivation of wisdom is for you to see any existing things as they truly are. You are not changing anything. The only thing that you change is your mind. This is only to turn your ignorance into wisdom: to know what is what, to know that your physical body is not you or yours, to know that your body is impermanent, and to know that any physical pain belongs to your physical body and not to you. If you can see your body clearly, then you will not be troubled by the ageing, illnesses, and death of your physical body.

Another aspect that you need to contemplate is the unattractiveness of your physical body. If you consider your body as something beautiful and attractive, there will then be sensual passion (*kāma-rāga*). Once sensual desires arise, there will be lust. Once there is lust, there will be sexual desires. It will be very tormenting to not

be able to fulfil them. If it were to happen to a monk, then that monk would not be able to remain in robes and would eventually have to disrobe because he wants to sleep with those he considers beautiful and attractive.

Your sexual desires will diminish if you contemplate the foulness of your body, such as their ageing, illnesses, death, decomposition, and internal organs. This is why your ordinator taught you to recite during your ordinations the five key words, '*kesā, lomā, nakhā, dantā, taco*', meaning head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, and skin, respectively. Your ordinator taught you to contemplate the unattractiveness of your body—to consider various organs and conditions within your body and not just their external features and appearance. Seeing only the attractive parts of your body will conjure up sexual desires, which makes it difficult to remain celibate, thus leading to disrobing in the end.

This all concerns the cultivation of *pañña*. You alternate it with the cultivation of *samādhi* because after a period of contemplation, you will be exhausted. So you need to take a break to rest your mind. You need to stop contemplating and get into *samādhi* to recharge. This is just like your body that needs rest and sleep and food after a long day of work. When you wake up, you can resume your work. When you contemplate to the point where your mind is no longer interested or distracted, you need to stop and get back into *samādhi* and calm your mind. You should

alternate them accordingly until you can rid yourself completely of various desires and cravings that are in your mind. Once you have eradicated all these cravings, there will no longer be any dukkha in your mind.

The contemplation of your body and sensations are only the first two tests. The third test is the contemplation of the foulness of your body. The fourth test is the contemplation of your mind (*citta*). Your mind is also subject to the three characteristics of all existence and beings (*tilakkhaṇa*), namely impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). The term, *citta*, refers to various moods and mental states that are in your mind. Your mind are in a constant flux—depending on the day it can range from being clear and happy to gloomy and sad. It is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self. You need to contemplate in order to become detached from its conditions just in the same way. This is to not have any desire for your mind to be in a certain way. Whatever condition it is in, just be aware of that. So you won't have any desire. When there's no desire, then there's no suffering. Without suffering, then there's no problem.

That's all the problem there is when it comes to dukkha. The cause of dukkha is craving. The means to eliminate the cause of craving is *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*, which are what you are here to learn and practise.

I'd like to conclude the Dhamma talk here. May you be blessed with merit.









# *Chapter 5*

## *No rebirth is the ultimate*

*11 November 2006*

**G**reetings and blessings to all Buddhists—seekers of merit and virtue. Today is Saturday, November 11, 2006. It's a day in which all of you have sacrificed your valuable time to come to the temple to cultivate wholesomeness. This is to give rise to mindfulness, wisdom, faith, and determination, which can in turn, motivate and guide you to walk on the right path—one that is proper, wholesome, and beneficial, while bringing you peace and happiness.

Listening to a Dhamma talk, in particular, is very beneficial as it is a pursuit of knowledge, mindfulness, wisdom, and intelligence. If you listen to Dhamma talks often and regularly, you will gain the wisdom and ability to discern your own ignorance, which often misleads you to follow the wrong path—one that is improper and unwholesome.

Wisdom is paramount to a person's way of life. There is a big difference between people with wisdom and people without. People with wisdom are full of happiness and at ease, having no problem or trouble that causes suffering and turmoil in their hearts. However, people without wisdom—ignorant people and those full of delusions—are constantly subject to all sorts of dukkha.

Studying is an extremely important aspect of Buddhism. Learning and acquiring knowledge will provide you with right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*)—a view in accordance with the truth. It will, in turn, eradicate any wrong views (*michā-diṭṭhi*)—views that are not in accordance with the truth. Sammā-diṭṭhi can eliminate any delusions—mistaking things that are wrong or bad as right or good, and vice versa.

If there is delusion or a lack of wisdom, there will then be *michā-diṭṭhi*—mistaking something that is wrong as right. This misapprehension has, in fact, been unknowingly inherent to you all the while.

It's rare that a very capable person, like the Buddha, would appear to address such an issue—one that is prevalent in the hearts of all people. He investigated the issue until he could see clearly that all the problems of humankind lie nowhere but within. They are due to your ignorance and lack of wisdom. They are created by your delusions (*moha*). They are caused by your ignorance (*avijjā*)—not knowing the truth about life and how contentment (*sukha*) and discontentment (*dukkha*) arise.

This is the problem of all humankind. For when there is delusion and a lack of wisdom, it will result in seeing something that is false as true, thus driving you to go through the endless cycles of rebirth, old age, illness, and death. This

is the problem of all beings. Your delusions lead you to be reborn. Once born, you have to fight against various kinds of dukkha:

*Dukkha that arises out of old age,  
Dukkha that arises out of illness and pain,  
Dukkha that arises out of death, and  
Dukkha that arises out of separation from loved ones.*

All these kinds of suffering can be found in every becoming (*bhava*) and every rebirth (*jāti*).

The Buddha, with an astute wisdom that was the result of his continuous accumulation of wisdom and merit over many aeons, was able to discern the root cause of our problems. All of our problems originate from our delusions—mistaking the right path and walking the wrong path.

Instead of walking on a path of greatness and victory filled with peace and happiness, you choose to walk towards a place full of enemies, full of problems, and full of various kinds of dukkha that beset you incessantly. This is all due to your own ignorance. The Buddha's quest for enlightenment led him to the conclusion that the real problem of all human beings lies in their own ignorance—not knowing that no rebirth is the ultimate.

Not being reborn is what extinguishes all problems. When there is no rebirth, then there is no ageing, illness, death, and separation. You wouldn't need to deal with all the problems that you all face. All of your problems would be eradicated completely if you didn't have to be reborn again.

Imagine if you were dead already and didn't have to be reborn again, you wouldn't have to deal with ageing, sickness, and death. You wouldn't have to lament and cry when your loved ones left you. You wouldn't have to regret or grieve over the loss of things you cherished. You wouldn't be bothered and upset when you came across unpleasant things you didn't want.

All of these things are dependent upon rebirth, that is, their root cause is rebirth. This is what the Buddha realised. He even discerned the underlying cause of our rebirth, which is the various kinds of craving. They include: *kāma-taṇhā*—craving for sensual pleasures; *bhava-taṇhā*—craving to have, craving to be; and *vibhava-taṇhā*—craving not to have, craving not to be.

You should try to observe whether these three kinds of craving are within you. Do you still crave to see, crave to listen, crave to taste, crave to eat things, and crave to go on a trip somewhere? If you still do, it shows that you still have *kāma-taṇhā*—craving for sensory pleasures.

Sense objects (*kāma*) include forms, sounds, odours, flavours, and touch. These so-called ‘five sensual pleasures’—forms, sounds, odours, flavours, and touch—are the things that come into contact with the body. Any hard, soft, hot, or cold object that the body experiences is considered touch. Receptors for forms, sounds, odours, flavours, and touch are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, respectively.

As your mind still craves for these sensual pleasures, you need to seek them out almost on a daily basis. Once you get up, you have to get dressed to go out—to go to work in order to earn money and buy whatever your heart desires to have, to see, and to hear. These various kinds of craving are what prevent the mind from being calm. When your mind is not able to remain still, you will never be happy and at ease.

No matter how much you have, it cannot satisfy your cravings. Even if you’d just gone out eating and drinking last night, you’d still want to go out again tonight. These cravings don’t get diminished by the things that you acquired; they are cravings for sense objects. You should ask yourself whether you have these cravings. If you still do, then that is the problem. You have to try to subdue and extinguish them if you want to rid yourself of dukkha. This is one kind of craving.

Another kind of craving is *bhava-taṇhā*—craving to have, craving to be. Do you still have this type of craving? Do you still crave for things? Do you still long for a new car, a new house, a new husband, a new wife, a child, and a grandchild? These cravings are what keep your mind from being able to remain calm, thus searching constantly for things. Even after you have actually acquired what you craved, you would still be unfulfilled and unsatisfied, as other cravings would arise in their place. You would get bored with whatever you have acquired and would ceaselessly want something new to replace it. All sorts of problems would follow because you do not know that the real problem has to do with your own cravings.

Instead of fighting to subdue and extinguish your cravings, you turn yourself into their slave, thereby promoting them to be even stronger. The stronger the cravings get, the more problems they will create for you. When you were little, you had the cravings of a child, so you didn't have so many problems; you only wanted to play as a child. However, once you became adults, your cravings only grew and got bigger, creating more problems.

For instance, your craving to spend money would keep you splurging until you run out of it. Being short on money, you'd then have to borrow or get loans and mortgages without being able to repay them. In the end, problems would arise: you might even get arrested and put in jail or have to run away from your creditors.

This is a problem that you unknowingly created for yourself. You thought that you were making yourself happy, but you forgot that your self-created happiness was just a cover up—the up-front happiness of having spent the money—for dukkha. However, once the money is gone, you would then have to borrow or get loans and mortgages to continue spending.

Being used to spending makes you unable to stop splurging as it has become your habit. When you have borrowed or have gotten loans and mortgages and are unable to pay them back, then problems and other issues ensue. You might resort to running away, but if you are unable to escape, you will be locked up in prison and have to repay the debt. These are problems that arise from craving to have and craving to be; they are the problems that make you unhappy.

You are unable to remain still and be at peace despite the fact that you already have enough of the basic necessities for living—the four requisites. You already have food for consumption, clothing to wear, medicine for treatment, and a home to live in. But that is not enough. Having just that is not enough still: you must have requisite 5, requisite 6, requisite 7, 8 and so on. You must have a car, a mobile phone, a television set, a radio, a refrigerator, and an air-conditioner; you must have all sorts of things.

And so, how was it? Has your life improved compared to before? Or is it the same as before? Or has it worsened compared to before? It's gotten worse, in the sense that your mind has become weak by being unable to live modestly. Instead, you have to live like a disabled person who requires supporting devices.

You end up not being able to live without an air-conditioner, not being able to live without a car, not being able to live without a refrigerator, and not being able to live without a mobile phone. That is all because you are being driven by cravings—impelling you to have and to be.

You cannot live alone or be by yourself. There needs to be a husband, a wife, a friend and so on. You cannot just simply be an ordinary person. You must have a title, a rank, or an honour—craving to be a member of parliament, a prime minister, or a minister; and craving to be a boss, a manager, or a director. All of these are called 'bhava-taṇhā'—craving to have, craving to be. Such things are what create problems for your mind.

The mind is just like a slave at the beck and call of cravings. Think about it. Is there a difference between someone who is a slave and someone who is not? For someone who is a slave or a servant, he has to act according to his master's command when called or given an order. He cannot excuse himself and say, 'I'm resting now', nor can he ask to rest because he has to

act immediately and in accordance with his master's whim. But what about someone who is not a slave? He is at ease and free. He has no one to order him around. He can live leisurely by himself.

This is something you do not really consider because, once a craving has arisen, it deprives you of mindfulness and wisdom. That is, you aren't in the right frame of mind, so you adhere only to the craving's order. Not indulging your craving is tormenting for the mind.

Just think about how it feels to desire something and not be able to obtain it. You get upset from not being able to fulfil your desires. There's a sense of turmoil even while trying to acquire the thing you crave. There is a sense of dissatisfaction when it is unobtainable. This is all *dukkha*. But if there is no craving, then there is ease. There is ease in simply sitting quietly. There is absolutely no hassle with anything.

Another kind of craving that the Buddha talked about is *vibhava-taṇhā*—craving not to have, craving not to be. The former is craving to have, craving to be; *vibhava-taṇhā* is craving not to have, craving not to be. What do you crave not to have, not to be? You crave not to have debt, crave not to have problems, crave not to have *dukkha*, crave not to age, crave not to have sickness and pain, crave not to die, crave not to be poor, as nobody wants to be poor, and crave not to be put in jail. All these are called '*vibhava-taṇhā*'—craving not to have, craving not to be.

This is also a problem because once you are born, you have to grow old, get ill, die, and be separated from your loved ones. Once the craving not to have and not to be has arisen, it will cause dukkha to arise.

How does it feel to think about ageing? Do you get delighted? Is there anyone who delights in thinking about getting old? But if you craved to get old, would you not then be happy to age?

Just like if you were single, you'd crave to have a husband or a wife. And once you had a husband or a wife, you'd feel delighted. On the other hand, if you were someone who craved not to have a husband or a wife, but somehow ended up having one because of a mistake, then you'd feel troubled and upset.

These are the cravings that cause all kinds of dukkha in your life. They are what compel your mind to be unable to be still. Even after your physical body has already broken up and ceased to exist, the cravings are what compel your mind to look for a new becoming, a new realm, a new birth, to be reborn again in order to continue pursuing them.

Your physical body is like a car. You are used to using a car on a daily basis to leave the house to run errands and go places, so you need a car. Even when the car is no longer functioning, you still need to go places because you cannot stay put. You have to look

for a new car. If you have money, you can buy a new one. If you don't, you can take a bus or taxi. But it isn't possible for you to stop going places, because it has already become a habit.

Have you ever observed whether you can simply stay put at home for a day, such as on a holiday, or a Saturday or Sunday? Have you ever told yourself, 'Today I won't go anywhere or do anything'? It's only when you are feeling ill that you don't go out. But if you're well, you'll find whatever excuse to go out no matter what. This is the craving that is buried within your heart, just like an engine that keeps a car running constantly. This is the problem you're not aware of.

Only the Buddha and his noble disciples know all these issues well. This is because they thoroughly investigated and discerned that the problem is craving. They also learnt how to extinguish these cravings. Your cravings can be eliminated. Putting an end to them is not beyond your capability. If you set your mind to ending them, there is no craving that cannot be eliminated. You can extinguish all the various kinds of craving.

If you used to smoke but came to understand that cigarettes aren't good and rather harmful, as smoking subjects your body to premature death and illnesses, you'd give up smoking. It may be somewhat tormenting for your mind to quit, at least

at the beginning, but the agony wouldn't last long and would go away. It's like treating a wound: when you have a wound, there is pain. But with repeated dressing and endurance, the pain will subside as the wound heals.

It is just like when you step on a splinter and need to remove it: it can be somewhat painful having to use a needle to pick it out. But if you do not remove it, it will be painful all the time, wherever you go. There is no way for the pain to go away until you remove the splinter. If you are willing to put up with the pain that comes from removing the splinter, then once it's pulled out, the pain will go away. When the wound heals, no pain will remain.

Cravings are just like splinters in your heart: you have to remove them. Do not leave them in; such is not the way to address the issue. Indulging your cravings does not make the problem go away. It only makes the splinters, or the cravings, go deeper into your heart, which makes their removal that much more painful.

You should not procrastinate when it comes to relinquishing your cravings. The longer you leave the splinters in, or the more you indulge your cravings, the worse they get. When it is time to remove the splinters, or relinquish your cravings, it will be that much more agonising for your mind.

It is your duty to fight against and relinquish all these cravings with wisdom (*paññā*) as a guiding principle. That is, if you want to find true happiness in this life and beyond—including any existence after liberation. Nothing but wisdom can get rid of all the various cravings (*taṇhā*). Meditative absorption, or concentration (*samādhi*), is what supports wisdom. Moral virtue (*sīla*) is what supports samādhi. Generosity, or giving (*dāna*), is what supports moral virtue.

If you lack moral virtue, you should first be generous and make merit. Once you have made merit through giving, you will develop moral virtue. With moral virtue, you can practise meditation, causing samādhi to arise. Once you have samādhi, you can use wisdom to eliminate cravings.

For instance, you know that smoking is harmful, but you cannot give up smoking without samādhi. You will not be able to fight it due to a lack of mental strength. But once you have samādhi, your mind will then have the mental strength. It will be capable of relinquishing the craving for smoking.

Regardless of cravings of any kinds, be it kāma-taṇhā, bhava-taṇhā, or vibhava-taṇhā, they all must be extinguished by means of wisdom. They must be rid of with wisdom, which has samādhi as its support. Moral virtue, or sīla, is the support of samādhi. Generosity, or dāna, is the support of

moral virtue. Right view, or sammā-diṭṭhi, is the support of generosity.

Making merit through giving leads you to develop moral virtue, samādhi and wisdom—they are to extinguish dukkha by eliminating all the cravings thoroughly from your heart. All of these qualities ought to arise from having sammā-diṭṭhi. Such a right view can only arise from having heard and listened to Dhamma talks regularly.

Having listened regularly to Dhamma talks and the Buddha's teachings, you will then understand why you need to make merit through giving, why you need to maintain moral virtue, why you need to develop samādhi and why you need to develop wisdom.

You need to discern through contemplation the harmfulness of things. This is because all the things in the world are just harmful: they are merely dukkha. Whatever you possess, it is just like feeding poison to your body.

There is no problem from being by yourself. But once you live with someone, problems will arise. Problems and dukkha are bound to occur from having either a husband or a wife. You may suffer due to concerns for one another, anxiety, quarrelling, and separation.

This is the dukkha that will accompany all the things you seek to possess. This is because when you sought things out, you did not use wisdom but acted on your cravings. By thinking that having a husband or a wife will bring happiness, you seek out a husband or a wife. This is without any consideration that doing so brings both happiness and unhappiness together.

It's like a coin: a coin doesn't have just one side. A coin has two sides, heads and tails. Similarly, everything that you want to possess is just like a coin with two sides—having both benefit and harm, and having both dukkha and sukha. But you do not see it; you only see just one side—the side of happiness. You do not see the side of suffering that follows, in particular, the dukkha that will follow for an extremely long time; that is, the perpetual cycles of rebirth and death due to various cravings. You do not see this, so you have to go through the cycles of rebirth and death, just as you are doing right now.

All the becomings and births you've been through are countless. It is not possible to count or estimate; it is incalculable. And it will continue to be like this if you do not rid your heart completely of these cravings. They will drag you through an unstable life with happiness at times and unhappiness at other times.

When there is sukha, there is no problem. But when there is dukkha, then it can be very miserable. There could even be

times that you can't bear to carry on at all. People may even kill themselves when they have so much dukkha. This is because of their thinking that once a life is ended, so is dukkha. But dukkha does not lie within the body; it is in the mind. The mind is something that can't be destroyed. Destroying the body will not end the dukkha in the mind. This is because the dukkha in the mind is born out of various cravings.

If you want to rid yourself of dukkha, then you have to rid yourself of your cravings—reduce and eliminate them. Give up the three kinds of craving: craving for sense objects or *kāma-taṇhā*; craving to have, craving to be, or *bhava-taṇhā*; and craving not to have, craving not to be, or *vibhava-taṇhā*. This is your real goal in life. All the various cravings are your real enemies that you must defeat.

You need to reason with yourself when you want something. You should ask yourself whether it is essential. Can you live without it? If the answer is that you can live without it, then it is not essential. But if you cannot live without it, then it is considered essential.

Things that you acquire due to necessity are not considered cravings, such as air for breathing. Can you survive without air? No, so this is what you consider a necessity; you need the air to breathe. But as for a car, is it necessary? Can you live without a

car? If you can do without it and you can't afford it, why should you struggle to obtain it for no reason? You would only create hardship and dukkha for yourself. The happiness from a car is not worth the burdens or dukkha that comes along with it. They include the burden of making monthly payments, the burden of maintenance and the burden of filling up the tank. Only dukkha and problems follow.

You just don't think. If only you stopped and thought for a little bit, you would then be able to eliminate all kinds of problems and all kinds of cravings. It is not beyond your ability. You all can do it.

Whatever amount of craving you manage to curb will be in proportion to the amount of dukkha reduced. If you managed to eliminate your cravings completely, there would then be no dukkha left in your heart. This is what you should aim for—to relinquish all three kinds of cravings completely from your heart. This is because there is nothing more harmful than these three kinds of craving.

You need to study and listen to Dhamma talks in order to understand fully and know clearly that all of your problems lie in delusion—not knowing that craving is the root cause of dukkha. The dukkha that you experience on a daily basis is all due to your cravings.

You then ought to listen to Dhamma talks regularly to remind and teach yourself repeatedly to not crave for anything in this world, for it is not real happiness. It is more dukkha than sukha. Not having these non-essential things actually brings more joy and peace.

Just compare someone with a drug addiction with someone without one. Who would have more dukkha? The one without the addiction would have less dukkha, whereas the one with the addiction would have more dukkha. Similarly, a person without any possessions would have less dukkha in comparison to someone with possessions.

If you compare a person with a spouse to a person without one, the one without a spouse would be more at ease and with less dukkha. However, a person without wisdom will not be able to see this and will think that having a spouse will bring bliss and happiness. This is a delusion.

You need to visit a temple to study and listen to Dhamma talks, just as all of you have been doing regularly. You should keep coming and doing it on a regular basis. Your wisdom would then progress and flourish, enabling you to see wrong as wrong, dukkha as dukkha, and sukha as sukha. So you wouldn't see things as the opposite of how they really are, like you do at the moment.

You still see dukkha as sukha, so you still rush towards dukkha without any end in sight or being tired of it. When you experience dukkha, you cry and lament and blame others, but you never blame yourself or your own ignorance and delusion for seeking out all the various kinds of dukkha.

You already have good role models, such as the Buddha and his noble disciples. They led their lives on, and demonstrated for you, a path leading to genuine happiness. Yet you are not that interested in taking them as role models. Instead, you like to follow the examples of ignorant people who need to have all kinds of countless possessions and then end up crying and being distressed without end. This is because you do not have wisdom and you do not know how to see properly.

If you take the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha as role models, then it is guaranteed that your life will proceed with certitude towards happiness and away from suffering.

I would like to remind you about the study of Dhamma in hopes of giving rise to wisdom. Gaining insights is, in turn, for the sake of uprooting any delusions in your mind and for the sake of eradicating completely any cravings, which are the root cause of dukkha, from your heart. So, for the sake of your happiness and to benefit your practice, I have given you this talk for your consideration.

I would like to end this talk, as it seems appropriate, considering the time. May the three refuges—the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha—as well as the merit and virtue you have made today, protect you from any suffering and danger.









# *Chapter 6*

## *Knowing the six elements*

*25 April 2010*

**I** have always said that with birth naturally comes death. The mind, itself, does not die. So what is there to fear? And yet the deathless mind needlessly frets about death. On the contrary, the body, which is subject to death, is not concerned about it and neither are the skin, muscles, sinews, and bones. The very thing that frets about death will not die.

So you need to learn this truth for yourself and you'll be very much at ease with everything in general. It is to seek out the one that does not die—your self. But why can't you see your self? That's because there is no mirror. And the only mirror that will show you the reflection of your mind is the Dhamma.

Mental cultivation through meditation practice (*bhāvanā*) is to create that mirror for the mind. Seeing one's mental reflection will open up the Eye of the Dhamma—the eye of wisdom which will allow one to see the truth that the body and the mind are two separate entities. The body, consisting of earth, water, wind, and fire, is bound together with the knowing element—the mind—by the power of craving and desire and as a result of past good and bad deeds (*puñña and pāpa*).

With previous good deeds, you'll be born as a human, whereas you'll end up as an animal because of your previous bad deeds. The two conjoined entities, i.e., the body and the mind, will disunite after a while and then eventually reunite once again under a new form. This back and forth process has been on-going for an incalculable period of time.

But those with the bodies never look into this truth. They repeatedly think that their bodies are themselves with every rebirth. They worry and suffer whenever their bodies may not last.

If you had a mirror for your mind just as you do for your body, you'd see that your body is not you and vice versa. The Buddha hence taught us that the body is: not self (*anattā*)—not you or yours; impermanent (*anicca*)—subject to birth, ageing, illnesses, and death; and full of sufferings (*dukkha*)—if you get attached to the idea that it is you and yours. Together they form the three marks of existence (*tilakkhaṇa*).

If you can discern this truth (*Dhamma*), you'll have the mirror to see your self and won't be afraid of death. *Venerable Aññā Koṇḍañña* once said, 'Whatever has the nature of arising has the nature of ceasing', which indicates his discernment of the perceiver and the perceived being two separate entities.

The perceived—the body consisting of earth, water, wind, and fire—isn't the one who knows. The perceiver—the mind—only temporarily takes possession of the body, which is bound to deteriorate over time and disintegrate into its original elements of earth, water, wind, and fire.

When you die, the fire element comes out of your body, leaving it cold. The water element flows out while the wind element dissipates, leaving behind just the earth element. So it is very clear where you belong as opposed to your body. Your body is not you—the owner has already moved on and the body didn't. Such is the case with everyone.

Everyone's mind is the same: all minds have the same 'knowing' quality or element. They only differ in whether they truly know or have penetrated the truth. Those who know will not suffer; they'll let go and not become attached to their bodies. They don't want new ones, seeing clearly that the body is a burden: *'bhārā have pañcakhandā'*, or the five aggregates are a heavy burden.

Take the Buddha and his noble disciples for example—they still had to endure the burden of taking care of their bodies after having attained enlightenment. They had to look after themselves: feeding and cleaning their bodies and maintaining their health, which are one way or another, a burden.

With no body, there is no burden. With no children, there will be no burden of taking care of them. Having children, you have the responsibilities and obligations to care for them: from the very day they were born until they are grown up and can look after themselves. This is the mirror for the mind or the mind's glasses—the faculty of wisdom (*paññā*) or the light of Dhamma that will help you see the reality.

The Buddha was the only person who managed to figure it out for and by himself. His enlightenment had to do with penetrating the truth about his heart and mind—to know why one suffers or gets elated. One's suffering is due to their delusion: to become attached to the five aggregates (*khandhas*), thinking that these aggregates are themselves and belong to them. The Buddha explained about it in the truth about suffering (*dukkha-sacca*): clinging to the five aggregates brings about suffering. There will be no suffering when there is no attachment. Even with the five aggregates, without any attachment, there cannot be suffering.

The Buddha and his noble disciples weren't concerned about their bodies: they didn't suffer because of them. It didn't matter to them how and when they might die, because they didn't grasp to the idea of the five aggregates that made up their bodies as being or belonging to them. They were aware at all times that their bodies were merely compositions of earth, water, wind, and fire.

The Four Noble Truths consist of suffering (*dukkha*), the cause of suffering (*samudaya*), the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*), and the path to the cessation of suffering (*magga*). Suffering comes from being subject to birth, ageing, illnesses, and death; parting from what one loves and cherishes; and experiencing things that one doesn't want or appreciate. In short, they are to do with clinging onto the five aggregates—being attached to one's own body and those of others', including husband's, wife's, children's, parents', and friends'.

As soon as you become attached to the idea that someone is your friend or family, you want them to be well and live long. You suddenly feel shaken and troubled when something that threatens their well-being happens. This is all due to your own ignorance, which brings about mental volitions (*avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*). It is a misapprehension—mistaking things for what they are not. You don't see that nothing is truly you nor belongs to you (*sabbe dhammā anattā*) and that everything in this world is merely made up of earthly substances.

The elements that are visible include: earth, water, wind, and fire. The other two invisible ones are air and the mind. All living beings are made up of these six elements, whereas other beings consist of only five elements. Humans and animals consist of the four earthly substances, the 'knowing' element (the mind), and the air element. The air element is

the voidness that surrounds and is within your body; it fills wherever there are gaps and holes, such as your nostrils.

The knowing element is your mind, which is in charge of your body: the mind is the master whereas the body is its subject. It is this very element of knowing that puts your body to work, to go places, and to speak. It is the element that is both the commander and the perceiver, being aware of various stimuli that come into contact with your five senses: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body.

‘Avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā’ is to not be aware that the body is merely made up of earthly substances. You mistake your body as you and that it belongs to you. You’re happy when your body is in good health and you get upset when it isn’t. This gives rise to craving (*taṇhā*): *kāma-taṇhā*—craving for sensual pleasures; *bhava-taṇhā*—craving to have, craving to be; and *vibhava-taṇhā*—craving not to have, craving not to be. Your craving is what gives rise to suffering, or *samudaya*. Clinging (*upādāna*) and craving are both due to ignorance, which leads to suffering.

All the sufferings you experience are in your mind; they are due to the three types of craving. It bothers you when it is hot because you don’t like the feeling of being hot. And wanting it to be cold also makes you unsatisfied. If you accept the heat and let it be, then you won’t get upset. You won’t need to have an air-conditioner or to look for ways to quell the heat. You may live if you can

endure it, and you may die if you cannot. You won't suffer with such an attitude because there is no clinging or attachment. You won't think that you feel hot by not assuming that your body is you. Your true self doesn't feel hot; it only acknowledges the heat that your body experiences. You, as a perceiver, don't feel the heat that your body does. You are being cooled by the calm, that is, from leaving things be and being equanimous (*upekkhā*). There is none of the three types of craving: no craving for sensual pleasures; no craving to have, craving to be; and no craving not to have, craving not to be. Welcoming and accepting 'come what may' are the goal of meditation practice.

It is to train your mind to let go—not grasping or holding on to things that comprise six elements: earth, water, wind, fire, air, and the knowing. You'll be able to let go when you clearly see these six elements in everything. Nothing will bother you, being aware that everything is made up of these six elements, including your own body and mind as well as those of others'. Your house and other possessions are also made up of these elements.

A big piece of diamond, to which we assign value, is merely a stone composed of elements. We get fooled by the worldly conventions. It, in fact, has no real value; it's just a piece of rock. All the bank notes with numbers, such as 1,000, 500, and 100, are just papers, to which we give worth.

When you were small, you used to play games and cards with fake notes; nobody thought of those children's money as real, contrary to those of adults'. They're, in fact, all fake and just papers; their worth lies upon the assigned value that people are willing to believe and accept. So they use these sheets of papers to trade for goods. An American dollar, for instance, is printed with 'In God We Trust' on it, which gives it credence. In reality, it is just a sheet of paper, but everyone is willing to believe in and accept its assigned value—it becomes something out of nothing. If you were lost in the woods and found a pile of diamonds, would they be of any use to you? Wouldn't it be better to have found a bunch of bananas?

You don't use your wisdom to see things clearly. You were taught from the day you were born to accept certain conventions and so you did. You were told that this body is your father and that body is your mother and so on and so forth, and so you believed it. Everyone is just a human. Does a master look any different from his subject? Perhaps if the master had some horns, he might then be somewhat more special than his subject. But nobody has horns; everyone has arms and legs—the same thirty-two body parts. So what is the big deal? You all get lost in these conventions, thinking that someone is more special than others, by simply not using your wisdom. In actuality, everyone is just merely a body, consisting of the four basic elements—earth, water, wind, and fire. That is wisdom.

This is how you'd keep up with your defilements (*kilesas*). This is how you should view and reflect on things in order to be free from worldly conventions. You all are attached to these conventions, and so you must learn about and contemplate them continually. That's today's homework for you: to contemplate and see all the elements involved and try to deconstruct them while identifying each individual element.

The earth element is anything solid; the water element is anything fluid. Anything that is a mixture of earth and water elements will have a bit of consistency, whereas it will be clear with very little or no earth element in it. Take mineral water, which has some but very little earth element in it, for example. Otherwise, how can it be called mineral water? If not, it would be called distilled water, which has almost no traces of earth element in it.

All things are compositions of the four earthly substances, which are impermanent—coming together and splitting up eventually. It is in the nature of these elements to revert to their original states. Water element will rejoin its source, and so will earth element. They are bonded together by external conditions and factors, but they will eventually break apart. Take a tree that grows from the ground, for example. A seed in the soil sprouts from having been watered. With no water, heat, or air, the tree will wither and die. There need to be four elements involved in order to grow and sustain a tree. If any of them is missing, it

won't survive. That is, it will die if the breaking-up factors are overwhelming.

Your body succumbs to death due to the fact that all these four substances are no longer in harmony, thus set to break apart. In the beginning, the force that holds them together has more power, making the body grow. When that force fades—unable to compete with other conditions and factors set to break them apart, the body starts to age and gradually declines to a complete dissolution in the end. Each of the elements reverts to its own source, leaving behind nothing—no entity and belonging to no one. You should keep contemplating your body in this manner so that you can let go and become detached from it. When you're ready, you can test yourself whether you can truly let go of your body. You should go to places that scare you or pose threat to your body.

All practitioners from the Buddha's time up until the present have had to put themselves to the test. They venture out into the woods in order to be alone and face their own worst fear. If they are wise, they'll be able to quell their own fear at its peak by being aware that their bodies are not them or theirs. They'll be able to surmount their own fear of death and let go of their bodies with their own conviction that their bodies are simply made up of earthly substances. As soon as you let go of your body, your mind will stop fretting and separate from

your body. Your mind will become concentrated to the level of one-pointedness (*ekaggatārammaṇa*); your body and mind are completely independent. You'll no longer have any fear after that point, knowing that your mind is not affected by whatever happens to your body. There is no point in fearing death once you've let go of your body. Your mind will be very much at ease.

Which would you choose between your body and a fully concentrated mind? That's why the Buddha said enlightenment (*nibbāna*) lies with the death. If you're not willing to die, your mind will not reach the level of enlightenment—the absolute calm. But you need to practise before you get to that level. You need to train yourself. You won't have the strength if you don't. You'll end up losing your mind when you get there; instead of entering a state of calm, you'll lose your grip. This is because you have no control over your own defilements, which will push your mind to its limit and end up being incoherent. Those who practise and end up losing their minds aren't aware of their mental strength. That's why the Buddha set down the rule for new monks to stay with a teacher for a minimum of five rains-retreats (*vassa*). This is for them to acquire knowledge and skills to protect their own minds before taking on the real battle with their own kilesas.

They have to establish some practice with their own teacher in the beginning—letting their teacher bring out the defilements in

them and intimidate them. It is to see whether they can manage to let go. If they can, they won't be afraid of their teacher and then they'll be free to go off on their own. The teacher won't let them leave if they're still afraid of him. Those newly ordained monks, who choose to be by themselves, don't generally benefit much from it and tend to be worse off, barring those exceptional ones, like the Buddha.

You can't really say that the Buddha didn't have a teacher. He did spend time and learn from several teachers. He didn't go off on his own right away; he tried out and studied at different schools. Being under a teacher's guidance is rather important. The Buddha wouldn't have laid down the rule if it weren't so. Any new monk is to stay with a teacher for at least five rains-retreats—to learn from and take after his teacher or ordinator. If an ordinator can't teach himself, he will assign and arrange for the new monk to be with someone who can.

New monks need to seek permission from their teacher before going anywhere. They can go to places if allowed, and if not, they have to stay put. If they don't listen to their teacher, then they'll be expelled, ending the mentorship. It is a waste of time and effort if a student doesn't listen to and obey his teacher.

Acquiring skills and knowledge is thus very important for new monks, that is, those who are beginners in terms of practice. The

Buddha laid down learning the Buddha's teachings (*pariyatti*) as the first step. They need to find 'someone who knows' to guide them if they don't yet know themselves. They have to do and practise according to their teacher's guidance (*paṭipatti*) until they gain some results (*paṭivedha*). In short, theory leads to practice, which brings about attainment.

Having penetrated the Dhamma, they can then go on to teach other people. It is up to them whether or not they would teach others; there's no fixed rule on that. It all depends on their causes and conditions. For those who cannot or do not have access to a large group of audience, they might choose not to. Or people might not be drawn to learn from certain monks. Those who teach tend to have both the ability and audience.

The most important thing for any practitioner is *paṭivedha*, or attainment—reaping results from their effort and practice. To achieve that, one needs to practise properly, or *paṭipatti*: *su-paṭipanno*, *uju-paṭipanno*, *ñāya-paṭipanno*, *sāmīci-paṭipanno*. To practise correctly, one needs to have a proper teaching, or *pariyatti*: *svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo*.

From whom would you have a proper teaching, or *svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo*? You would need to study the Buddhist Pāli Canon (*Tipiṭaka*), which is believed to have been passed on since the Buddha's time. Or you would need to learn from

noble disciples and respectable teachers—those who have been practising properly and well and attained enlightenment. This is so that you would gain proper teachings.

The teachings—the Dhamma—that the Buddha set forth are guidelines for all Buddhists to cultivate their minds. This is regardless of whether they are laypeople or monks. The guidelines are all the same; there's no difference. The only difference is in terms of time that one would have to devote to the practice.

If you're a monk, you can dedicate yourself fully to your practice from the moment you wake up until you lie down. There is no other obligations to interfere with your practice. If you're a layperson, you'll have very little time to spend on practising, or hardly anytime at all in a day. If you're not that determined and have properly factored it in your schedule, you'll have almost no time to practise. As soon as you wake up, you need to rush to work and earn your living. You then have to rush home in the evening to eat and rest while seeking pleasures from entertainment and relaxing. This is all so that you will have the energy to go to work the next day. Laypeople, therefore, don't have much time to practise.

If you were to ask if there's a difference between laypeople and monks? There is no difference really. They both have the five aggregates; both have their bodies and minds. The difference lies

in their level of commitment to the Dhamma. If they're very committed to this path, they will have the will to renounce their lay lives and get ordained as monks in order to commit themselves fully to their practice.

There is, however, no difference if they get ordained but don't practise, that is, still carry on with worldly obligations. There are monks who never do their sitting or walking meditation but only carry out other functions, such as merit-makings, funerals, offerings, and chanting. These merit-makings entail accepting invitations to laypeople's homes, chanting for them, eating, and accepting their offerings. The monks then take their rest in the afternoon, have their afternoon drinks, and go to bed at night. They repeat the same routine the next morning. These functions vary from accepting offerings to merit-making and chanting for the dead or at a funeral when someone dies.

Monks who carry out such a routine are not unlike laypeople because their routine is not that of Buddhist renunciants—not the duties that the Buddha prescribed to perform or for Dhamma practice, not deeming them as important. To chant or to recite is to pass on the teachings of the Buddha, serving three key purposes: 1) to help the chanter learn about the Dhamma and give rise to wisdom, 2) to help calm the mind while reciting the Buddha's teachings, which is a form of meditation practice, and 3) to preserve and pass on the Buddha's teachings.

The Dhamma that comes from your heart and the Dhamma that the Buddha taught will perfectly align with one another. There will be no issue or doubt about it. If you only study the Dhamma but don't put it into practice, there will be no results, causing you to doubt about the accuracy and legitimacy of the Dhamma and so on.

To preserve Buddhism through chanting and reciting alone will not cut it; Buddhism will surely vanish eventually. It will die out if there's no practice, even if there's an archive of the Tipiṭaka. All the various forms of archive will be nothing more than letters if there's no real comprehension of the readings, only leaving behind confusion and doubts.

Take this topic on the six elements for example. If you haven't heard or learnt about it before, you'd definitely get confused. Without having practised, you won't understand, but you would be able to grasp it quickly if you have. You'd immediately understand it after reading this because you're aware that the six elements are nowhere else but within your own body. All these six elements are in you.

Everything that the Buddha taught only points to your body and mind. The Four Noble Truths also have to do with your body and mind. The truth about sufferings is about being born, ageing, illnesses, and death. It has to do with nothing

else but your body's subjection to birth, ageing, illnesses, and death. It is only your mind that suffers, clinging onto the idea that the body is you and belongs to you.

Preserving Buddhism can only be done through study, practice, and attainment. In the ancient days, that was the main reason for chanting and reciting, but that is not the case today; all the chanting is carried out for bank notes or as a ritual. Making donations with the money that you receive is at most a form of generosity (*dāna*). But giving is not a monastic duty per se—for someone who has already renounced his wealth and possessions. To ordain for the sake of livelihood is not the real or the right kind.

To really ordain—having renounced everything—is not for the sake of gaining wealth and possessions. It is for the sake of practice, that is, to voluntarily not get involved with money. Sometimes it is unavoidable, which is the case with many respectable teachers, who have been offered with money by their lay devotees. They are not interested in seeking or gaining wealth; it just happens to be that way, and so they use it for the benefits of others.

It can be problematic if they haven't yet attained enlightenment. Any defilements that they have will bring about greed, leading to craving and possessiveness. So to get involved with money

and wealth can be detrimental. But if they've already attained enlightenment, then they've completed their task [of eliminating defilements]: *vusitaṃ brahma cariyaṃ*. Their dealing with a very large sum of money will not be an issue because they are fully aware of the fact that money is just made up of basic elements, or merely papers.

The money can benefit those who are in need, helping those who suffer from starvation, homelessness, and poverty. But the money is no use to the teachers themselves, be it their bodies or minds. They are detached from their bodies and minds; they cannot be affected as they no longer have any craving. Any amount of money will not be of use to them. In fact, it will become a burden for them to safeguard and manage while putting it to use for the maximum good.

Any new monk, who desires to have money and wealth as his teacher does, is clearly misguided. The purpose of ordination is not to gain wealth but to seek out the Dhamma and become liberated from suffering. That is the duty of monastics as well as any Buddhists.

Our goal is to rid ourselves of the sufferings that are within our hearts and minds. The more you practise and are able to forego, the less suffering you'll have. All the things that you possess are like fire. All the money and wealth are like fire that keeps

burning within you: the happiness that you gain from it is incomparable to the suffering it brings. But you get excited by money and wealth because of your own ignorance. You think that it will make you happy, but little did you know that you won't be able to be without it once you've become attached to and dependent on it.

If you're not attached to your money and wealth, then you'll be able to make do with whatever you have. Rich people, therefore, tend to suffer more than the poor. They're afraid of being poor, whereas the poor aren't because they're used to it. Poor people suffer because they want to get rich, as opposed to the rich who suffer from not wanting to be poor. Or their suffering comes from wanting to be even richer, so they end up suffering either way. Being rich, they want to become richer, and on top of that, they are afraid of being poor.

So don't bother to become wealthy. Don't be scared of poverty. Just simply be content with having enough to feed yourself on a daily basis. Don't waste time with excessively making money or safeguarding your wealth. It is better to care for your mind through studying the Dhamma, meditating, and reaching attainment. Once you become enlightened, your mind will be safe from all sufferings. There won't be any discontentment or suffering that arises from craving and desire as no defilement remains in your heart.

Such is the core of it all: to purify your mind from all of the greed, hatred, and delusion. Nothing else is as important. Nothing can purify your mind but learning, practising, and attaining—the main duties of Buddhism.

If you already have enough to live off, you should then focus on these three main duties so that this lifetime of yours won't be a waste. Only humans can carry out these Buddhist duties and only while there's a proper teaching of the Buddha—*svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo*—as their guidance. Without the proper teaching, one will not be able to practise correctly and gain the right results.

You are all very fortunate—full of merits—to be born as humans while there is still a proper teaching. It will be a waste of opportunity if you don't make the most out of it. You need to take this into consideration and see it for yourself. This kind of opportunity is rare: to be reborn as a human and come across Buddhism at the same time are very unlikely.

The Buddha listed four things which are rare: 1) the existence of the Buddha, 2) to be born as a human, 3) to have the opportunity to learn about and practise the Dhamma, and 4) to be alive. You have all these four things at the moment. You're a living human who has come across the teachings and a chance to learn about the Dhamma and put it into practice.

The only thing missing is the practice, that is, to practise and learn about it even more.

You only do your studying and practising once a month, which is not enough. How would it be to eat only once a month? Why don't you do your study and practice just as you have your meals? Since you eat three meals a day, you should then also do your study and practice three times a day: morning, midday, and evening, an hour or two each time. While your body thrives and benefits from your good care, your mind is defiled because you hardly care for it as you do for your body. If you treat your mind the same way as you treat your body, it will be in a much better form and you'll be much happier. Please consider what you've heard today and put it into practice as you deem appropriate.











# *Chapter 7*

## *Letting go of self and other fetters*

*12 June 2011*

**H**aving listened to the Dhamma and not being able to penetrate it, i.e., reaching attainment, are due to the lack of concentration. You'll be able to penetrate it if your mind is concentrated. If you can't pull your mind together, you won't be able to access your mental base (*citta*). You won't be able to get to the roots of your craving and desire (*kilesa-taṇhā*), nor will you be able to penetrate the Four Noble Truths.

You'll be able to readily eradicate your defilements by listening to the Dhamma if your mind is fully concentrated to the level of one-pointedness. Take the five renunciants (*pañcavaggiyā*) for example. They had thoroughly cultivated themselves spiritually, in terms of precepts (*sīla*) and practice (*samādhi*), but their faculty of wisdom (*paññā*) was still lacking. They weren't aware of the three marks of existence (*tilakkhaṇa*): impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). No one had ever figured it out or taught it before. Having heard about it from the Buddha, they could readily rid themselves of their belief in a self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), which is one of the very subtle defilements, [or the ten fetters].



*The five renunciants—pañcavaggiyā—listening to the Buddha*

This belief in a self is the notion that the five aggregates (*khandhas*)—forms (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), memories (*saññā*), thoughts (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—are oneself and belong to oneself. The Buddha demonstrated to them that they were bound to suffer if they clung to these five aggregates, which are impermanent—*anicca*, unsatisfactory—*dukkha*, and not self—*anattā*. This type of suffering or discontentment, one that belongs to the Four Noble Truths, stems from your craving and desire. It is to long for the five *khandhas* to last and be according to your wishes, and you feel insufferable when they don't. The suffering from craving is what the Four Noble Truths entail; it has nothing to do with the five aggregates, the body, and the sensations, or *vedanā*.

The sense of discontentment deriving from your craving and desire stems from your ignorance (*avijjā*). It is a result of your not being aware that these mental volitions are born out of your own ignorance—'*avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*'. This very ignorance is to be unaware that the five aggregates are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not self.

The five *khandhas* are not you or yours; they are merely natural phenomena that arise, last for a while, and cease to be eventually. Your body or form—*rūpa-khandha*—is a combination of the four elements (earth, water, wind, and fire) that happens to arise and last for a while, and will cease to be. Your mental aggregates—

*nāma-khandhas*—are natural phenomena and conditions that occur in your mind and will also pass in time. None of these aggregates is a permanent entity. The five renunciants could readily penetrate this truth after learning it from the Buddha.

With a concentrated and calm mind, you'll be able to notice the arising of the Four Noble Truths in your heart. A sense of discontentment arises when you crave for your body, feelings, memories, thoughts, and consciousness to be in a certain way. Your craving is the cause of your suffering (*samudaya*), which has nothing to do with your body and sensations. Your mind becomes agitated just by thinking about ageing, illnesses, and death. Your suffering is due to *samudaya*: craving for the five aggregates to be according to your wishes and not realising that they are not you nor belong to you.

When you're happy, you want it to last for as long as possible. And when there's suffering, you want it to go away as soon as possible. You want your body to last and not be ridden with illnesses. These are all craving and desire, which are *samudaya* or the cause of suffering. To penetrate the Dhamma is to grasp these very truths, that is, to be fully aware of the Four Noble Truths in one's heart by discerning suffering and its origin.

Having listened to the Dhamma is considered the path (*magga*). Your understanding of the Buddha's teaching about the five

aggregates being impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not self, will allow you to free yourself from them. You'll be able to relinquish your desire for the khandhas to be in a certain way in acknowledging that you cannot fight the very truth about these five khandhas. You will be able to accept however they may be.

As soon as you accept such reality, the suffering in your mind will disappear immediately. This is because you've put an end to its cause, or *samudaya*. You've ended your craving to not get old, to not get ill, and to not die. It is to simply be aware and let it be, come what may. You observe it with a level of discernment using your mindfulness and insight, bearing in mind that all is inherent with the characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self. You are aware that you need to let go and leave be. And as soon as you can do that, the suffering will disappear.

This is the Noble path (*ariya-magga*) and its fruition (*ariya-phala*). You need to discern this false sense of self first before penetrating different levels of the Four Noble Truths. This belief in a self is what brings you suffering. *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi* is a misapprehension, which makes you mistake things: to see things that are wrong or bad as right or good. It makes you regard the five aggregates as yourself and yours, causing you to grasp onto them. Such an attachment gives rise to craving—wanting the five aggregates to be as you wish, resulting in *dukkha*. Such suffering is the very kind of the Four Noble Truths that belongs to your heart.

You need a calm mind to realise such suffering. Your mind needs to be pulled together to the level of one-pointedness (*ekaggatārammaṇa*). You'll notice the presence of mental proliferations in coming out of calmness. There's no proliferation during meditative absorption, thus no suffering (*dukkha*), cause of suffering (*samudaya*), end of suffering (*nirodha*), and path to the end of suffering (*magga*). There's only a temporary cessation of suffering, or *nirodha*, which is a result of your concentration. This is because both memories and thoughts are not active at the time, hence no concoction that would give rise to suffering.

Coming out of your *samādhi*, your mind will start thinking about forms, feelings, memories, thoughts, and consciousness, bringing about cravings. With cravings come discontentment and suffering. With the help of mindfulness and wisdom, you'll be able to quell your craving by being aware that the five aggregates are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not self. It will allow you to keep calm and leave them be.

In keeping calm, that sense of uneasiness that comes from your craving will dissipate. This is because you're being aware of the nature of these *khandhas*—their arising and ceasing. Keeping this in mind, you'll be able to let go, relinquishing your craving which causes you to suffer. The only way is to accept 'come what may'. You cannot fight it. You cannot deny the truth and have to accept the reality. That is to gain enlightenment.

First is to establish concentration—to have a calm mind—in order to gain access to the roots of your craving and desire, which lie at the basis of your citta. That’s why you need to cultivate your meditation practice to the level of your mental basis. It is to uproot the cause of your craving and desire, which is all of your delusions (*moha*).

Sakkāya-diṭṭhi, or the belief in a self, is the first misapprehension. The second one is *vicikicchā*—any doubt or uncertainty in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Having discerned the Four Noble Truths at the level of your mental basis will dispel such doubts. You won’t doubt whether the Buddha actually existed, even though you have never seen him. In knowing that the Four Noble Truths are the teachings of the Buddha, you won’t doubt whether his teachings are valid. You won’t have doubts in the monastics—those who see the Buddha and the Dhamma.

The Saṅgha, in this case, are those who have already gained the Eye of the Dhamma, or stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*). They are monks who practise truly and well, the ones who have already gained access to the mental basis through concentration and meditative calm. They are the ones who see clearly the Four Noble Truths, or the dynamic of dukkha, samudaya, nirodha, and magga. For them, there’s no longer any doubt in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha; they see no point in travelling to India to pay respect to the four commemorative places.

Those who feel the need to visit those places are the ones who have not yet seen the real Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha in their own hearts. They need to at least see the ruins at which the Buddha lived—the places where the Buddha was born, where he became enlightened, where he demonstrated his teaching for the first time, and where he died and went onto the final realm. This is all to give them faith, conviction, motivation, and energy to follow the Buddha's footsteps. It is so that they will put their effort into studying the Buddha's teachings and cultivating their practices until they can reach the level of the Noble path and fruition.

To get to the real level of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, you need to start with making merit (*puñña*) through giving (*dāna*), keeping your precepts (*sīla*), and cultivating your mindfulness (*sati*) to channel your mind into samādhi. In leaving your meditative calm, you should investigate the three characteristics of existence inherent in rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra, and viññāṇa in order to discern the Four Noble Truths. You'll realise the workings of suffering, cause of suffering, end of suffering, and path to the end of suffering that are in place in your mind. This is the benefit of listening to the Dhamma.

Nobody knew about the false sense of self—sakkāya-diṭṭhi—and the three marks of existence—*tilakkhaṇa*: *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*—before the Buddha discovered and put forward

these truths. Having learnt about the Four Noble Truths from his own mind and noticed this false sense of self, the Buddha demonstrated them to others. Those who were capable of comprehending such truths could readily penetrate the Dhamma and became liberated.

It is due to your inability to get to your innermost mental state, or the very basis of your citta, if you have yet to become liberated after having learnt about the Four Noble Truths and the three characteristics of existence of the five khandhas for such a long time. That is, your mind hasn't changed: it still believes in a sense of self and thinks that the five aggregates are you and belong to you. Your mind simply hasn't been cultivated to the level of one-pointedness.

Such is where the roots of the sense of self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), doubts about the teachings (*vicikicchā*), and attachment to rites and rituals (*śīlabbata-parāmāsa*) lie. *Śīlabbata-parāmāsa* is to not realise the cause and effect of your actions—doing good deeds and maintaining your virtue will bring you happiness. So when there's suffering, instead of addressing the issue by keeping your precepts, you resort to various rites and rituals, such as changing names, hair styles, and making offerings. They don't cure the suffering in your mind that comes from your bad deeds. You'd still feel uneasy for every time you act, speak, and think unwholesomely.

You'll no longer doubt the virtue of keeping your precepts once you've realised the Four Noble Truths. This is because whenever you break your precepts, your mind will be uneasy, due to your desire to not reap the results of your bad deeds. Whenever you do something unvirtuous, you don't want to be punished, hence feeling troubled. Having reached the basis of your mind, you'll notice that your sense of suffering and happiness all comes down to your thoughts. With wholesome thoughts, you will be at ease, whereas your mind will be agitated from any unwholesome thoughts. Addressing your suffering at its heart, or in your mind, will allow you to free yourself from your attachment to rites and rituals.

These are the fetters (*samyojana*) that shackle your mind to suffering. You suffer because of your sense of self, doubts, and attachment to rites and rituals. Your suffering will be relieved to a certain extent from having relinquished these three aforementioned fetters. However, there still remain two more fetters to relinquish: sensual lust (*kāma-rāga*) and anger (*paṭigha*); they also belong to the lower group of fetters.

Kāma-rāga is your sensual lust, particularly sexual desire. Paṭigha is anger and frustration. You may feel frustrated when there is a lust without any outlet. Having found a release for sexual desire would temporarily relieve your frustration. Sexual releases would quell your sensual lust for a while before it arises again, causing more frustration.

To let go of the sensual lust and anger, you need to reflect on the meditation subject of *asubha*, or foulness of the body. This is to take into consideration the unattractiveness of the body. You constantly see only the appealing aspects of the body; this is because you all love to flaunt those parts. Would you dare to leave your house and go to work, straight out of bed, if you haven't showered and gotten dressed? If you would, then there would be no need to contemplate the foulness of the body because you'd be constantly looking at all the unappealing aspects.

But you don't like flaunting these unattractive parts of your body to others. You only like to show off your appealing features, giving rise to sensual lust and sexual desire and leading to rapes and killing.

There won't be any rape if you only show off your unattractive parts to one another. You'll be safe no matter where you go. But instead, you choose the opposite and put yourself at risk. You should show the foulness of your body to others if you don't want to be sexually abused. Nobody would be interested in you if you dressed like a beggar, wearing tattered and smelly clothes. You would be safe.

You unknowingly put yourself at risk by not dressing appropriately—showing your skin and wearing tight-fitting outfits. This is why the monastery has to prepare these wrap-

around clothes (*sarongs*) for those who dress inappropriately to cover themselves before entering all the sacred places.

You need to contemplate the foulness of the body to rid yourself of your sensual lust and sexual desire. You need to pay attention to the body parts that are unattractive. You should picture people waking up, not having brushed their teeth or combed their hair, and going to the toilet. You need to imagine all the organs that are within the body. Consider them with your wisdom: to picture all the various organs that are underneath your skin, such as bones, heart, liver, kidneys, and intestines.

You'll be able to look at the body from a very well-grounded perspective if you keep contemplating *asubha*. It is to look at both the internals and the externals to curb your lust. You can also imagine the dead or decaying bodies, which are the very bodies that you long for; they are all bound to cease and decay. You need to consider how a corpse looks after three days, after seven days, and after fifteen days.

In the old days, people left corpses bare in cemeteries and so vultures would prey on, maggots and insects would thrive off, and other animals would eat these corpses. You need to picture these scenarios to see clearly whether or not the body is beautiful. Bearing in mind of this foulness continuously will help counterbalance your view and attraction to appealing forms and

features. No matter how well people may dress or how beautiful they may be physically, you'll be aware of their unattractive parts that are not visible.

Such is a mental cultivation through the meditation subject of asubha, or repulsiveness of the body. Your lust will be levelled down if you can manage to reflect on about half of the foulness of the body. There will be a mix of boredom and craving. You'll be lustful when you stop reflecting on repulsiveness. You'll be turned off whenever you bear it in mind. This kind of discernment is at the level of once-returner (*sakadāgāmī*), who has managed to cut down their lust and anger but not yet entirely.

If you can reflect on repulsiveness continually, you'll be able to eliminate your lust and anger completely from your mind. That is, you'll be instantly reminded of the body's foulness by whatever you see. Such an ability to quell any attraction immediately will keep you uninterested at all times. Your mind will be free of bodily concerns. You'll see through every part and aspect of your body. This awareness includes: your false belief in a self; all sentient beings' subjection to ageing, illnesses, and death upon rebirth; the body's composition of earthly substances; and the unattractiveness of the body. Such discernment indicates an attainment at the level of non-returner (*anāgāmī*).

Anāgāmi means to not be reborn in the sensual realms; there is no longer any need for the physical body as a means for sensual pleasures. That is, one only seeks pleasure from the peace and calm in one's heart. Non-returners are not reborn into the realms of humans and heavenly beings (*devas*) after death, but into the heaven of the pure abodes (*brahmā*) until they manage to unchain themselves from the five higher fetters. These higher fetters include: desire for material existence or material rebirth (*rūpa-rāga*), desire for immaterial existence or rebirth in a formless realm (*arūpa-rāga*), conceit (*māna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), and ignorance (*avijjā*) of the refined level of the Four Noble Truths.

Uddhacca is restlessness of a very subtle mental state, which is different from the much coarser kind of the five hindrances (*nivarana*). This subtle form of restlessness results from the extreme workings of keen mindfulness and profound wisdom. It is a result of the mind being so excited to the extent that it has no bound and does not stop working or take a break.

At this particular stage, your mindfulness and wisdom will be running automatically, searching relentlessly for defilements and fetters that still trouble your mind, thus causing you restlessness. If you put your mind to rest through samādhi—to stop it from proliferating while keeping it calm, such restlessness will disappear. Once out of samādhi, you can

carry on seeking out defilements and fetters to eradicate them completely.

Attaining the level of non-returner, your mind is so refined that it will be full of joy, causing it to form attachments: rūpa-rāga and arūpa-rāga give rise to attachments to material existence (*rūpa-jhāna*) and immaterial existence (*arūpa-jhāna*), respectively. Your mental state will be sullied from coming into contact with external things because there is still a sense of conceit. It is to think that you are superior, equal, and inferior to certain others, which causes you grief.

For example, if you see yourself as a senior, you'll be unhappy with not being treated with respect by someone more junior. A mother can get quite upset by her children's disobedience and disrespect. You have to investigate your sense of conceit in order to see that it is purely conventional. It is all assumption that the other person is superior, equal, or inferior to you, just like a commander is higher in military ranking than a lieutenant.

In reality, all of our minds are the same: none is better or worse than others. Your citta is like a voidness with only feelings and thoughts. Out of ignorance of the truth, you end up clinging onto worldly conventions. Monks, for example, use the counting of rains retreat (*vassa*) as a conventional system of seniority. Those with more vassas may feel unsatisfied with the lack of respect from someone less senior.

You need to be able to see that it's purely conventions, all to do with status. Don't get attached or cling to it. The Buddha taught that we should think of ourselves as the earth, on which others can step and lay things. It wouldn't then matter when others mistreat, look down on, and disrespect you. It is to consider their behaviours as an act. So just simply observe. This is how to address one's sense of conceit.

Restlessness will arise from continually addressing the issue of conceit or ignorance through contemplation. It is to get to know and understand those senses of conceit and ignorance. You may have only heard about but yet to encounter them in person. That is, you've only read about desire for material existence or material rebirth (*rūpa-rāga*), desire for immaterial existence or rebirth in a formless realm (*arūpa-rāga*), conceit (*māna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), and ignorance (*avijjā*).

Now you've learnt about *rūpa-rāga* and *arūpa-rāga*, which is to become attached to the sense of calmness from not reflecting on *māna* and *avijjā*. You may otherwise go overboard with your reflection and turning it into *uddhacca*. The right thing to do when the restlessness occurs is to get your mind into the state of calm, be it a material realm (*rūpa-jhāna*) or a formless realm (*arūpa-jhāna*). Once your mind has regained its strength, you can leave the state of absorption and continue contemplating, and you'll be able to see your senses of conceit and ignorance.

Māna is a sense of self-regard. Avijjā is being unaware of the Four Noble Truths on a very subtle level—not realising the suffering that comes with a very refined and high level of happiness. Such happiness causes people to grasp onto it, wanting it to last forever while not heeding its fleetingness. This very subtle and radiant kind of happiness, resulting from having filed away the coarse and intermediate levels of defilements, is still a convention, inherent with the three marks of existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self.

Out of lack of experience, you would try to maintain such happiness. That is, you'd try to safeguard it when it starts to decline through mindfulness and wisdom. Being used to resort to mindfulness and wisdom in order to calm and purify your mind, you end up carrying on with the work—trying to safeguard such a blissful mental state—to the point where you realise that it's not how it should be. If it were the real enlightenment which is permanent, there would be no need to maintain it. If it is still subject to the three marks of existence, then you need to let it go. You need to let it be according to its nature whether it thrives or deteriorates. There is no need to safeguard anything.

According to Luangta Mahā Boowa, he thought that avijjā would be like a savage beast from reading about it. However, it appeared more like a little delicate thing in reality and so he ended up preserving it instead of undoing it with paññā, or insights—to

be aware that it is also impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not self. Having heard from someone who has been through it, you'll know immediately how to handle such a situation and not waste time when you reach that point.

You would, however, get caught in such a trap from not having been forewarned. You'd lack awareness and insights to discern the fact that you're serving your own ignorance instead of ridding it. Even though you meant to abolish it in the beginning, you'd end up doing the opposite when you come across it. You're simply not aware of your own ignorance. And when you are, you'll leave it be. You'll allow this subtle and exalted mental state to wane according to its nature.

Once you've let go, there is nothing left but the ultimate emptiness (*paramaṃ suññaṃ*) and the ultimate bliss (*paramaṃ sukhaṃ*). You'll experience the natural state of mind, which is pure, everlasting, and boundless. It is something that exists within all of us, but it is being obscured by impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self things.

Therefore, your duty is to keep practising in order to do away with these obscurities, or the ten fetters that are clouding your mind. You're to cultivate your mindfulness to firm up your concentration and gain access to your innermost mental state. In order to reach the level of these ten fetters, you need to

keep honing your mindfulness and get into the state of one-pointedness. This is to simply be aware of it, and so you'll be able to rid yourself of all the ten fetters.

Such is a way to attain enlightenment. It is to see clearly the Four Noble Truths—to be aware that dukkha is due to samudaya, that is, craving for things that are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not self to be according to one's wishes. All levels of the Noble path and fruition can only be attained through letting go.

To let go, you will need a technique or strategy. For instance, to relinquish your sensual lust and sexual desire, you'll need to realise that the body is vile and only full of waste. To free yourself from this false belief in a self, you'll need to realise the earthly substances that make up your body—earth, water, wind, and fire: they are not you and do not belong to you. Other discernments from your mental cultivation are as important as being aware of the Four Noble Truths: dukkha, samudaya, nirodha, and magga.

To have any supranatural visions is just the same as seeing any other things with your plain eyes: there is no real gain or benefit. You should, in fact, pay attention to your feelings towards the things that you see. You should observe whether or not they still evoke any affection, hatred, greed, and anger in you. Does seeing appealing images and forms still arouse you? Does seeing death still frighten you? These are the things you need to notice—your

reactions towards things with which your mind comes in contact. If you can see things for what they are, that is to simply be aware and remain equanimous, then you're set.

The Buddha once taught a man during his alms round: to simply acknowledge whatever sight and sound he comes across, and nothing more. Don't have any reaction to them. As soon as the man heard that, he became enlightened. He then went to prepare the requisites for his ordination but was killed by a bull while on the way. The story led to this misunderstanding among many Buddhists that you'll die within seven days after your attainment if you don't ordain. The Buddha's father himself also attained his enlightenment seven days before passing away. So suddenly there is this fear of dying within seven days after being enlightened if one does not ordain, which is a nonsense. It was likely more of a coincidence. How can having a shaved head and wearing robes protect you from death?

With little reasoning, or wisdom, among Buddhists these days, they easily get anxious by and readily form unfounded beliefs about the things they hear. They're the ones who are inclined to become attached to rites and rituals. You all need to hold firm to your reasoning—in accordance with the Dhamma. You should learn about the Buddha's teachings thoroughly. You can learn from the original source, or the Buddhist Pāli Canon (*Tipiṭaka*). You should study all of the key teachings and discourses (*suttas*),

such as *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*—Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion Discourse, *Anattalakkhana Sutta*—Not-Self Characteristic Discourse, *Mangala Sutta*—Blessings Discourse, and *Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta*—The Great Discourse on the Establishing of Mindfulness. This is so that you’ll know for yourself what the Buddha really taught. It will help you decide whether people who claim themselves to have certain abilities are real and whether their teachings are according to the Buddha’s.

Despite being Buddhists, you aren’t that interested in studying the Buddha’s teachings. You don’t really put your effort into it, unlike Westerners. Not being born in a Buddhist country, they have no choice but to study the teachings from the Tipiṭaka, and so they have better knowledge than we do. We take things for granted—in a way being blind to what’s in front of us—and so we don’t take the initiative to study these teachings.

Fortunately, there are respectable teachers, who had done their study and mastered their practice, that are willing to cater to your preference by feeding these teachings and knowledge to you. If you didn’t come here and listen to this talk, you would probably not have learnt about the Dhamma. You only consume worldly information and entertainment as soon as you get home. How can you make any progress if you don’t acquire knowledge about the Dhamma?

If you are a true Buddhist and would like to benefit from being one genuinely, you need to learn about the Dhamma. *Pariyatti* is to study. You then need to put that knowledge into practice, or *paṭipatti*. With practice, various levels of attainment, or *paṭivedha*, will consequently follow. Having attained enlightenment, you can give teachings to others and help to promote and preserve Buddhism.

It all comes down to study, practice, attainment, and dissemination of the teachings. You have to do it step by step and not cut corners like many people do. They skipped the practice after studying about the Dhamma to become teachers and start teaching without having truly attained anything. They then teach according to their imaginations—assuming how things should be. Their audience may get confused and not be convinced or may be misguided if they buy into it. This leads to a decline in Buddhism as wrong teachings are being perpetuated to the extent where people mistake wrong things as right and vice versa.

This is the duty of Buddhists. If you'd like to show your gratitude and pay back to the Buddha and his noble disciples, you need to act according to his teachings. It is to first learn about, to practise, and to attain the Dhamma before teaching others. That is how to truly pay respect to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, which will bring you blessings, happiness, and success in return.

There are laypeople who would like to build a new larger *sālā* here. I said that it won't happen because I'd like to preserve this forest setting and its quietness. There is no need for improvement in a materialistic sense but only in mental quality.

These materialistic things and developments tend to ruin one's spiritual progress. They don't go together. Wherever there's a construction, there can be no peace and quiet, thus no practice. Whenever Luangta gave his teachings, he would tell monks to not build anything. He knew that monks have such inclination—to build a hut (*kuṭi*), a hall (*sālā*), and a stupa (*chedi*), but they don't as much enjoy cultivating themselves on the Noble path and fruition and securing their mental calm.

In order for your mind to be calm, you need to first calm your body. Your physical surroundings need to be secluded, quiet, and peaceful. There's no mingling for monks. They only get to meet for activities, such as listening to the Dhamma, eating meals, going on an alms round, and sweeping. They don't socialise during these activities, focussing on each individual's duty. During the Buddha's time, people wondered if monks didn't get along as they hardly spoke to one another. The monks were, in fact, trying to restrain their bodies, speech, and minds—their minds in particular—in order to maintain their mental calm while leaving out any speculations and mental proliferations.

It shows that your mind is still full of concoctions if you're chatting away. The way of life of those who practise for the sake of the Noble path and fruition is rather different from that of those who don't. The ones who aren't into practice will enjoy conversing and socialising with others. People who are practice-oriented will know their own duties; they know they need to be in control of their thoughts and restrain their physical, verbal, and mental actions to calm their minds. That is, they'll do whatever it takes for the sake of their mental calmness. Your progress in meditation practice all depends on your mental calm. If your mind isn't calm to the level of mental basis, your wisdom won't be true wisdom—a kind that is able to eradicate your craving and desire.

Practitioners, therefore, need to be very strict: safeguarding their minds to be in line with the teachings; cutting down their craving and desire; foregoing any fortune, prestige, and praise; and refraining themselves from seeking any sensual pleasures. If you'd still consider applying for an MP position, then you're clearly not following the Dhamma path. You're acting according to the calling of your craving and desire—heading towards suffering and disaster. You can end up in jail if you break the law by not being careful and keeping your precepts. You will even have to repay for your bad deeds after death. It is up to you whether you'd believe this. Those who are wise will be convinced and have no doubt about it. They

won't dare to commit any sin and will stop seeking fortune, prestige, and praise as well as any pleasures through their senses.

It is clear why the Buddha and his noble disciples did not seek out fortune, prestige, praise, and pleasures like you all do; they simply will not end your suffering. So why do you still persist in pursuing these things? It's because you're under the influence of your own defilements. You're not mustering up the Dhamma in you to guide yourself.

You feel very lost and depressed when a respectable teacher passes away. It's because you haven't yet founded your own internal refuge—still clinging onto the external one, which is temporary and impermanent, unlike the internal one. Hence, you should work on fostering your own internal refuge through meditation practice.

You need to set your practice schedule. Don't just practise according to your mood. Set yourself a number of hours to meditate per day and a number of precepts you intend to keep. Cut down on seeking pleasure through your senses, such as watching television, listening to music, and reading anything non-essential. Limit the number of hours you spend on such activities and set up a proper schedule for your practice.

You'll end up doing things according to your craving and desire all the time if you don't set yourself a schedule but only follow your own mood. Your craving and desire will outweigh your Dhamma. You have to be quite regimented in order to lean towards the Dhamma. You ought to rein in your mind and guide it towards the Dhamma.

Don't get attached to anything that you are and have. Remind yourself constantly that one day you'll be parted from it anyway. You won't gain anything from it. And you can't take it with you when you die. The only thing that you can take with you is either your good deeds (*puñña*) or bad deeds (*pāpa*), your mental calm or agitation, and your craving or contentment. You'll end up with peace and ease if your mind is calm and content. Or you'll suffer if your mind is full of longing and desire.

Contemplate the futility of all the things that you have. The only thing, that is of any value to your life and soul, is the Dhamma that Buddha bestowed upon us. You should try to make the most out of it so that it will help lead you towards the end of suffering. You'll be safe once you've entered the stream—on the path to enlightenment; you know you'll get there in the end sooner or later.

If you haven't attained anything, you will be like a ship without a rudder when you die. You'll be guided by your past deeds, be they good or bad. Having established the Dhamma in your

heart is like having a rudder to help steer your ship, guiding you towards the aimed destination. You should learn about and make the most out of the Dhamma, particularly when it comes to Dhamma practice, or mental cultivation. Meditate and cultivate your mindfulness as much as possible. Focus on cultivating your mindfulness in every posture and at any time while you're awake; it should be your top priority.

Being mindful is like having reins to control a horse. Without them, you won't be able to guide the horse as you wish. Your mind is just the same: without mindfulness, or *sati*, it will fluctuate according to your mood. Sometimes your mental state will be wholesome, and other times unwholesome. But most of the times, it will be unwholesome, leading you towards ruin, suffering, and restlessness. You need to train yourself to be very mindful in order to bring your mind into full concentration to the level of one-pointedness and equanimity.

When you get to that level, you can apply the Buddha's teachings to your own mind: to let go, to cut loose, and to forego. If your mind is not concentrated—not being calm first and foremost, it won't be malleable. With concentration, your mind would be compliant, or under your control. Without concentration, it will be out of control. You won't be able to control your anger, greed, and craving when they arise.

With samādhi, but without discerning the three marks of existence—anicca, dukkha, and anattā, you'll be able to quell your craving at least temporarily by channelling your mind into concentration. You'll be able to rid yourself of the craving entirely if you contemplate further the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self nature of all the things that you long to have and be. Samādhi is thus paramount to freeing your mind so that it becomes independent. At the moment, your mind is not independent, but subject to your craving and desire. All these desires stir up your mind, making you feel insufferable and restless while bringing you all sorts of problems.

The Dhamma is thus most important. For it is only the Dhamma that will set your mind free from the overwhelming craving and desire and the subsequent suffering; you'll be at ease wherever you may be. Being rich or poor would mean nothing because it is not the real cause of happiness or suffering in your heart. The cause is, in fact, the Dhamma and kilesas.

You'll be at ease with the Dhamma and without any defilements. On the contrary, you'll only suffer if there are only defilements and no Dhamma. It has nothing to do with wealth, title, praise, criticism, or sensual pleasures. It all comes down to the Dhamma and kilesas. With Dhamma, your mind will be at ease and content at all times from not wanting to gain, to have, or to be anything; to simply be is the best and most wonderful.

Please take your practice seriously. Put all your effort into it. Think about the possibility of death on a regular basis. Your life is getting shorter and shorter. All the pleasures in this world are only temporary: you only experience it when in contact with it. But as soon as it passes, it is as if you've never experienced it. You always have to search for more—a glass that is always half empty. It's always depleting, leaving you lost and alone with an insatiable sense of craving.

You won't be in such a mental state when there is Dhamma in your heart. You'll be at ease and content. Such is the benefit of the Dhamma. Having experienced the mental calm, you'll be able to let go of everything. You should all try to reach that point, getting into your mental state of calm.

The Buddha could relinquish all of his wealth because he had experienced that mental calm when he was younger and alone by himself without his subjects. As soon as it was quiet around him, his mind also quieted down. Having already experienced it in the past and accessed this point before, his mind readily calmed down when his surroundings were conducive.

It is not the case for everyone. Some people get frightened instead of feeling calm when they are by themselves. It shows that they have never experienced such mental calm before. But if they have, they'd feel at ease when they are in a quiet

and private place. Try to make it happen, to experience it so that it will stick with you. You won't get lost in whichever realm and existence you may be in your next life, even if there's no Buddhism. You'll know that the real happiness comes from your heart, not from fortune, prestige, and praise.

You should heed the importance of meditation practice and mental cultivation. You should make the cultivation of mindfulness as your first priority—something to be carried out continuously from the moment you awake until you fall asleep. When there's nothing else to do, you should find a quiet spot to sit and close your eyes to calm your mind. When your mind withdraws from the calmness, you can then train your mind to be aware of the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self nature of all existence.

Keep contemplating. You'll see more and more clearly to the point where you realise that nothing in this world is worth preserving and having. You'll realise that everything only brings suffering and that it is inherent with the characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self. As everything is impermanent and uncertain, you're bound to suffer if you cling onto it. It is not you or belongs to you, thus being beyond your control. This is the result that comes from meditation practice.

With practice, results will surely follow. This fact is timeless: it happened during the Buddha's time and still happens today. It is simply a matter of cause and effect. A tree could grow out of earth and water in the past as it can today. The relations between these causes and effects don't change. It all comes down to you. You need to practise for yourself; no one else can do it for you.

What is lacking the most for you all is training yourself to let go and cut down the worldly lifestyle—to be less influenced by your defilements. You need to turn your life around and make it more in line with the Dhamma. Otherwise, you won't be able to reap and gain anything worthwhile. Do it for yourself; no one else can do it for you. Please keep on practising. Don't give up!











*Questions  
&  
Answers*

## *What can you do with people who have delusion?*

**I**f they cannot be taught, you must leave them alone. Buddhism does not seek to convert people. If they are willing to listen, then you can teach them. We consider things logically in Buddhism. We have to educate the mind in order to know what is right and what is wrong. We can then refrain from doing bad deeds and do only good ones.

We have to exercise restraints when it comes to acquiring things. This is because we usually acquire more than we actually need. Greed that comes from delusion and ignorance begets hatred—you get angry when you don't get what you want. If you have experienced the mental calm, you will be content. You will not want anything other than the four requisites of life: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine.

The body gets old, gets sick, and dies, but the mind doesn't. The mind is eternal and does not dissolve like the body. The mind goes from one existence to another because of the desire for a new

body. Past actions (*kamma*) will decide what kind of body you will have in the next life.

The mind can exist by itself without having a body. We all have a body because we still have sensual desires. We need the body to experience the five sensual objects: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects. If we practise meditation, we can eliminate these desires; there will then be no need for a body. Therefore, there will be no rebirth. To do this successfully, we have to live like a monk—a life without sensual pleasures.

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## *Can we still meditate and not become monks?*

**Y**es, I started meditating as a layperson and became addicted to meditation. To be able to practise all day, I had to quit my job and become a monk. When you become a monk, you don't have to work since everything is taken care of by the lay devotees. You'll be happy and content when you meditate. With meditation, you're exchanging your old way of life for a new one. Eventually, you'll make a complete switch. At the moment, we have two Westerners waiting to get ordained next month. One is from Atlanta, Georgia; the other is from Coutras, France. I have been here 27 years, and have been a monk for 39 years. Next February (2015), it will be my 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I spent nine years in the northeast of Thailand studying meditation, and then I moved here to be near my home in Pattaya. People become monks because lay life is full of problems. As a monk, I have to be frugal and austere, taking things as they come—with no running water, no electricity, and no amenities. I have only one set of robes.



## *How do I get my mind to focus when it is full of thoughts?*

**I**t is due to a lack of mindfulness; you haven't yet established your mindfulness. Mindfulness (*sati*) is what controls your thoughts—preventing it from thinking about other things. You should try reciting only the word, '*Buddho*'. It has to be done beforehand, prior to your sitting meditation.

Mindfulness is something that you must continually cultivate and keep up with from the moment you wake up to the time of your sitting meditation. If you cultivate your mindfulness only after starting to sit in meditation, your mind won't be able to quell all of the proliferations. You have to practise from the moment you awake. As soon as you're awake, just start reciting '*Buddho*' and then carry on doing your routine while reciting it. You may stop reciting it and focus on other things when they require your attention.

You should only think about necessary things. For instance, what is on today's schedule or your to-do list? Once you've figured

it out, you may then get yourself ready. You should carry on reciting 'Buddho' even while getting ready. Just keep reciting it and don't think about anything else. If you can manage that, your mind will easily calm down when you do your sitting meditation. You've already cut down your thoughts and there's mindfulness in place to keep a hold on them. Once in sitting meditation, your mind will quickly calm down with the recitation.

It all comes down to mindfulness for those who cannot seem to get any result from their meditation practice. You didn't cultivate your mindfulness beforehand. You start meditating right away when it is time, just like a boxer who goes into a match without any practice. As soon as he gets into the ring, he gets knocked out in the very first round. Without any training and practice with his partner, he ends up being knocked out himself, thinking that he can easily take down his opponent.

It is not unlike expecting your mind to be calm as soon as you sit down and start reciting 'Buddho'. Your mind readily goes astray thinking about other things with no more than two words of 'Buddho'. So it all comes down to your mindfulness. You have to be mindful at all times and as much as possible.



*How should I further my practice after having attained a mental state of voidness?*

**Y**ou have to try to maintain that state of voidness at all times—to be free of greed, hatred, and delusion. It's not good enough if you still have some greed, anger, and delusion. You just have to continuously maintain that voidness. If your mind is truly free or empty, then there won't be any greed, hatred, and delusion. If it's not truly free—temporarily empty—it will revert back to greed, anger, and delusion as soon as you're not being mindful. To permanently keep your mind clear, you have to resort to your wisdom faculty (*paññā*). That is, to rid yourself of any delusion, which is the root cause of greed, hatred, and delusion. Impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*) are what will cure your greed, anger, and delusion: to discern that everything is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not self. This is so that any situations you come across will no longer give rise to any greed, hatred, and delusion.

## *How do I avoid getting exhausted when I meditate?\**

**I**t is actually better to just focus on one thing or use just one meditation subject. If your mind is full of thoughts, you should resort to reciting '*Buddho*' first to calm it down. When your mind lacks energy and no longer conjures up all the thoughts, you should then stop reciting '*Buddho*' and carry on with watching your breath.

Don't do two things at once. You're overtaxing your own mind unnecessarily. However, certain people who are used to doing both in tandem would be an exception. It depends on each individual—each one of us has a different approach to calming one's own mind. Don't think that someone else's approach would also work for you. Their mental capacity is likely not at the same level as yours, being possibly higher or lower.

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\*I focus on two things while reciting '*Buddho*' when I meditate: the solar plexus and the in-and-out breaths. I notice that once my mind is concentrated, I would get tired from focussing on one thing and so I switch to the other.

So you should take note of your own technique and practice to see what suits you most. From my observation, if your mind is prone to thinking, following your breath alone would not cut it. You should start with reciting 'Buddho'; if even that doesn't work, you can start with chanting. Keep chanting to drain your mental energy to a certain extent so that it will stop proliferating, and then you can either recite 'Buddho' or observe your breathing. And if chanting doesn't help quell your mind from thinking, you can listen to or read some Dhamma to begin with. It will help you focus on the present, pulling your mind away from random thoughts. Once your mind is calm from reading, you can then close your eyes and watch your in-breath and out-breath.

Sitting in meditation is like driving. When a car is parked, which gear is it in? When you start the engine, you have to start from the first gear. You can't jump right to the fourth or fifth gear as it will stop the engine. It will also stop the car if you shift straight to the first gear when it is at a certain speed. You need to be aware of the car's speed and the road and use its gears accordingly.

The same goes for meditation practice, or mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). You need to observe your mental state—whether it is pliable or not and whether it is unruly or not. Your choice of meditation technique needs to comply with and suit your mental state or current mood.

*How can I address aches and pains on certain spots or just one side of my body when I meditate?*

**D**on't pay attention to the pain; it's all to do with your defilements (*kilesas*). The pain doesn't occur when you watch a movie, does it? Neither does it occur while reading and playing games, does it? If it only occurs while meditating, then it is your defilements.

Your kilesas will keep obstructing you from calming your mind as they cannot act out when your mind is calm. Defilements don't agree with sitting in meditation; they will create aches and pains on the body. Pay no attention to them. You may sometimes feel itchy here and there. Just don't pay any attention to them. Stick to your meditation subject. If you're reciting '*Buddho*', just stick to it and pay no attention to other physical sensations; they will subside in a matter of time.



*How should I deal with my grief and suffering as a result of my mother's illness and mood swing?*

**S**uffering (*dukkha*) arises out of ignorance—not seeing the truth or accepting the reality. People lack awareness and understanding of the impermanent characteristic of their bodies—the subjection to ageing, illnesses, and death that comes with birth. They also don't realise and accept the non-self aspect of themselves—the lack of control over their bodies as they wish. Your suffering is due to your own desire for your mother to be well and at ease. You get upset from seeing her suffer from being ill and in pain. It comes down to your own lack of mindfulness and wisdom: your body is impermanent—birth, ageing, illnesses, and death are only natural and expected—and not in anyone's control. Your suffering comes from wanting your mother to be in a certain way. You have to stop desiring and accept that it's only a natural course of anyone's body. Even you, yourself, will be subjected to the very same fate. Taking that into consideration will help you quell your desires and your suffering will subside.

*How do I overcome the aches and pains, despite acknowledging them and reciting 'Buddho', in order to reach a state of calm?*

**Y**ou just have to persevere with and keep fighting against it. If you cannot beat it this time, then try again the next time. The most important thing is to stick to only reciting '*Buddho*'. Don't do anything else.

If you have yet to gain concentration (*samādhi*), then just stick with '*Buddho*' to fight against the pain and discomfort. Don't try to make sense of them or quell them with insights. You are not yet at the level where you can do so.

In the beginning, you only need to use the word '*Buddho*' as your meditation subject. Don't pay any attention to the pain. Don't even wish for it to go away. Your suffering will only multiply if you wish for the pain to dissipate. It is not your physical discomfort that you cannot handle but rather your

mental suffering—your craving for the pain to subside. So you must try to eliminate that—not allowing your longing for the pain to go away to occur—including any sense of aversion, fear, and craving.

Don't let your mind think about fear and pain. Don't long for the pain to disappear. Just stay with 'Buddho'. Leave alone the physical pain. As long as you don't let the pain affect your mind, you will be able to cope with it.

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*How can you tell if your defilements have been cut down by your faculty of wisdom and not by your concentration?*

**I**n the case of concentration, your craving will not diminish but reappear once you come out of your absorption (*samādhi*)—your craving still remains, whereas it doesn't in the case of wisdom.

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*How do I train myself to focus on and control my mind while being aware of my breathing in all postures?*

**B**efore getting to the level of the mind, you have to first get through the levels of your body and your sensations. That is, you first have to be able to let go of your body. You have to fully understand the nature of your physical body first: being born, you're bound to get old and die. You have to fully understand the nature of your feelings and sensations (*vedanā*) that they come and go.

For instance, illnesses are expected and so your mind needs to remain equanimous with changes in your body and feelings. That is, you're not affected by ageing and death. When an illness arises, you're not bothered or troubled by it.

If you still cannot get through these two stages, you won't be able to reach the mental stage because that level is much

subtler. You have yet to develop enough mindfulness and insights to penetrate such a subtle level of the mind. You ought to cultivate your mindfulness and develop your insights in order to surpass your body and feelings first. You have to penetrate all the bodily matters, be they ageing, sickness, death, and physical appearance. You have to let go of all these matters before reaching that mental stage.

To observe your mind at the moment is somewhat premature and will not do you any good. You won't be able to control your mind anyway; even if you could, it would just be through your mindfulness. You're not fully capable of observing, controlling, and calming your mind as you wish. You won't be able to handle it when your mind acts out because you simply lack mindfulness and wisdom. Your absorption (*samādhi*) is not at the level that will allow you to control your mind. Just don't focus on the mind.

Don't concern yourself with observing the mind just yet if you still lack mindfulness. Instead, focus on developing mindfulness first. Focus on concentrating your mind first if you have yet to gain *samādhi*. Channel it into one-pointedness first. You won't be able to see and recognise your own mind if you haven't reached that level of one-pointedness.

The mind is simply the perceiver—the one who acknowledges. It is the one that remains equanimous (*upekkhā*); that is the mind. But once you leave your samādhi, your mental proliferation will turn its equanimity around—pulling it away from being cognisant and perceptive to being misguided and deluded. You won't be able to maintain that mental state—to simply be aware and remain equanimous—unless you're able to eliminate your physical desires and emotional craving. Putting an end to these two types of craving and desire will allow you to gain access to and control your own mind, thus taking care of its waywardness.

It's like a toddler who cannot fully stand on his own two feet; he needs to be trained to stand properly first before learning to walk and to run. Don't let him walk or run just yet. The Buddha taught us to cultivate wisdom from a very coarse level to a very subtle one. The body is much coarser than the feelings, which are again coarser than the mind. You have to take one step at a time. Don't rush or skip as it won't do you any good.



*How can one tell of progress in meditation practice—making advances from one level of absorption to the next?*

**Y**ou'll be able to tell if you keep practising. It's like eating: you'll know how full you get. If you keep eating, you'll get to the point where you can no longer consume any more food, so then you know that you're fully stuffed.

If you keep doing your meditation practice and keep cultivating your mindfulness either through using your breathing (*ānāpānasati*) or '*Buddho*' (*Buddhānu-sati*) as your meditation subject, you'll know when you reach a level of absorption—there will be a sense of fulfilment.

There is, however, no indication while practising that you've reached a certain level. There will instead be a sense of ease and lightness according to each level of absorption. It can feel like a gradual change as if you're stepping down

a staircase. Or it can also feel a sudden drop like falling into a sinkhole.

This is something beyond your control so you shouldn't worry about it. What concerns you is to be mindful at all times. Just stick to watching your in-breath and out-breath if breathing is your meditation subject.

Don't think about other things: focus on your breathing in and out and stick to it solely. That is, focus on the point which is most prominent, either at the tip of your nose or just above your upper lip—just keep focussing on that particular spot. Don't get distracted by random thoughts, and a sense of calm will arise. Whether it occurs gradually or suddenly is irrelevant.

To cultivate mindfulness is all that matters. Just don't think about other things no matter what. You shouldn't get bogged down nor elated by any type of progress. For instance, some people get caught up in a sense of rapture (*pīti*) that may arise and stop meditating. If so, then they'll get stuck with that sense of rapture. But if they carry on, they'll get pass that point and reach the end.

If it were a bus, it'd be to take the ride until the final stop and not get off along the way. Once it has reached the final

stop, it'd not go any further. The final destination for the mind that you wish to get to is called '*ekaggatārammaṇa*', or one-pointedness. It's the so-called equanimity (*upekkhā*), which is when the mind is simply aware and does not conjure up anything. It is a sense of voidness with no rapture nor contentment. The only thing that remains is a sense of equanimity; such kind of happiness surpasses the kind that arises out of rapture.

I would like you to keep meditating the same way you keep eating your meal, that is, until you feel content. When you reach the point where you can no longer consume any more, you'll know you've reached that level of fulfilment.



*Is there a boundary to an awareness of suffering (dukkha)? Does dukkha, itself, have boundaries and to what extent?*

**Y**ou need to be aware that the suffering that you experience has to do with your mind and not your physical body. For example, when your body is healthy with no ailments—eating and sleeping properly—and yet you still feel uneasy, that is the kind of discontentment of which you need to be aware. The dukkha that is in your mind entails any sense of dis-ease, worries, anxiety, and agitation.

You also need to be aware that the dukkha, which is in your mind, comes from your own craving. It is your craving for things to be in a certain way and when things don't go according to your wishes, you feel agitated and uneasy.

Such discontentment, or dukkha, needs to be addressed on a mental level. It is to see to the root cause—your craving. For

instance, you shouldn't crave to fix or change someone else. You get upset when they don't act according to your wishes. If you want to cure your discontentment, you shouldn't try to fix or change them. Don't criticise or force them to act according to your wishes. You instead should quell your own craving: take into consideration that whoever upsets you doesn't belong to you (*anattā*)—not within your command nor under your control to do or act as you wish them to.

To rid yourself of your own dis-ease is to put an end to your own desires for others to be in a certain way. Such are the boundaries of being aware of your own suffering. It is to know that the suffering comes from your own craving and desire; it has only to do with your mind and not with your body.

Physical suffering—the sickness and pain of your body—may also be the cause of your mental agitation. For instance, when you're ill, your longing to get well or fear of not recovering and death are all considered 'cravings'. Your longings for your body to not suffer, to recover, and to not die all give rise to your discontentment.

You may be able to address the issue temporarily on a physical level. For example, seeing a doctor when you're ill will cure your dis-ease temporarily. But you'll get all upset again when the sickness reoccurs.

You need to address the issue in your mind if you want to cure your suffering permanently. It is to curb your mental craving of wanting your body not to get sick. You have to accept the reality: your body is always prone to illnesses and will die one day—no one can prevent the inevitable.

If you can rid yourself of your desires to not get ill or die, you'll then be permanently free from your suffering and discontent related to your health and sickness. You won't suffer no matter how often you may be subjected to illnesses—your mind won't be troubled or affected.

This is how to address the issue—to cure the craving in one's heart and mind and not the suffering of one's body. The physical suffering is rather trivial. What really matter are the dukkha in your mind and its causes: craving not to age, not to get ill, and not to die. Your ageing, illnesses (whether you recover or not), and death will not bother or matter to you in any way once you've addressed the root cause.



## *How is cultivating mindfulness related to being aware of dukkha—the first of the Four Noble Truths?*

**C**ultivating mindfulness (*sati*) has to do with the fourth Noble Truth, or the path (*magga*). It is to be aware and mindful of the movement of and changes in your body. There are four foundations to the Establishing of Mindfulness: body (*kāya*), feelings (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*), and phenomena (*dhamma*).

In the beginning, you have to start from the body—to use it as your basis (to cultivate mindfulness) for it is the easiest object of contemplation. Feelings, mind, and phenomena are subtler and more profound, hence difficult for beginners to penetrate. You have to be able to establish an awareness of your body first—to ground your mind and train it to be in the present in order to gain concentration (*samādhi*). You'll be able to see your suffering (*dukkha*)—the first of the Four Noble Truths—once your mind is concentrated. You won't be able to discern the first of

the Four Noble Truths when your mind is restless, unfocussed, and distracted. When you're unhappy, you'd blame the things that you can physically see. You'd blame others, attributing your unhappiness to their actions. In reality, your discontent is due to your own craving—wanting them to be in a certain way.

In order for you to notice your unhappiness or discern dukkha—the first of the Four Noble Truths, you first need to calm and focus your mind. You ought to cultivate your mindfulness because it will lead to your mental calm and concentration. With a calm mind, you'll be able to notice the difference immediately when suffering arises. It's because your mind will waver as opposed to being tranquil. The arising of suffering is like repercussions of throwing a stone into a pond.

Only those with calm minds will notice the suffering when it arises, whereas those with unruly minds won't because their minds are constantly in flux. So to discern the first Noble Truth, or dukkha, requires an establishing of mindfulness—getting the mind concentrated first. The Buddha thus emphasised cultivating the path, or magga. Magga includes: generosity (*dāna*), precepts (*sīla*), and mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). Bhāvanā is basically to establish mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).



## *Are there some tips to deal with sexual desires?*

**S**exual craving (*rāga*) results from seeing things that are appealing. So to quell them, you have to look at things that are unappealing. Seeing things that are appealing will give rise to appreciation and sexual craving. Seeing things that are unappealing will lead to aversion and repulsion instead.

So you should consider organs and parts of the body that are unattractive and foul. If you only look at attractive parts, there will only be sexual craving. Recollecting repulsive aspects will help you curb those desires, such as looking at internal bodily functions.

Don't just focus on the appearance. You have to look beyond the skin-deep level: to consider things that are beneath the skin, such as bones, skull, and skeleton. What exactly are you looking at when you see someone with an attractive feature? You're only looking at their skin or externals, aren't you? You don't see things that are below the surface; underneath the skin lies the skull. Will you still have sexual feelings if you see their skull or other internal

organs, such as their heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, intestines, and so on? You can go and take a look at the butcher shop of these internal organs; be it of cows or pigs, they are all the same. You'll see if there will still be sexual desires. This is how to quell your sexual craving and arousal—to look at unappealing aspects of the body.

You have to learn to consider and observe these things in advance. It will be too late to look at them when your sexual desires have already arisen because you won't be able to focus on unappealing and foul aspects. It's like handling a fire: you need to have a bucket of water ready in case of emergency. You won't have the time to look for water when there's a fire. You need to prepare all the preventative measures in advance, so that you can readily use them to douse the fire when it happens.

So you need to take into consideration the foulness of the body (*asubha*)—to contemplate the dirtiness and loathsomeness of one's body, such as bodily waste, sweat, odours, excretions, decaying corpses, and internal organs underneath the skin. You have to reflect on them—to train yourself in advance—in order to readily handle sexual desires, should they arise. You won't be able to manage if you don't train yourself in advance. You won't have the strength to use *asubha* to put out *rāga*.



*How does one get to communicate  
with others through telepathy?  
Are there ways to attain that level  
or ability?*

**Y**ou just have to calm your mind. However, not everyone with a calm mind will have such an ability. It depends on your accumulated merits and perfections. If you had practised and trained your mind in your previous lives, your mind would have this telepathic ability.

The Buddha, for example, could communicate with various celestial beings. Luangpu Mun's mind could also communicate with other heavenly beings (*devas*). That's why all the devas were grateful to them because the devas could listen to their teachings, just as you are at the moment.

But if someone who teaches Dhamma doesn't have such a telepathic ability, then the devas cannot listen or gain access to the teachings from them. All these supramundane abilities are



*Devadatta sinking into the earth*

like bonuses or gifts. It's good if you have them because you can use them to benefit others. But you must be careful. If you still have defilements (*kilesas*), you might get tricked by your own defilements and use them in a way that will bring more suffering.

You should pay no attention to and leave these supramundane matters alone if you have yet to attain liberation; you'll end up being the subject of your own kilesas. Instead of ridding yourself of defilements, they will make your kilesas even more powerful. Take *Devadatta* as an example. You have to be careful as they will only waste your time. They'll derail you from and ruin your practice for liberation as you'll end up not practising. When you get into a state of absorption, you'll want to communicate with other people and minds. Or maybe you'll want to recollect your previous lives or know about what others are thinking. These things could very well happen, but are nonetheless not of any use to your practice and aim for liberation.

But if you've attained enlightenment, you may then use your knowledge and these special abilities as means to help you teach others. They can promote your audiences' faith and conviction while encouraging them to put what they've learnt into practice.

The Buddha, for instance, used his supranatural ability with *Angulimala*. Angulimala was running as fast as he could but he couldn't catch up with the Buddha who was walking calmly. 'The



*Angulimala chasing after the Buddha*

Blessed One willed a feat of psychic power such that Angulimala, though running with all his might, could not catch up with the Blessed One walking at normal pace.' This bewildered Angulimala so much that he called the Buddha to stop.

The Buddha said that he himself had already stopped and that it was Angulimala who should stop. Angulimala asked for further explanation, after which the Buddha said that he had stopped himself from his own greed, hatred, and delusion. Angulimala suddenly came to the realisation that his pursuit was out of his own misapprehension—a misguided path. He then put the Buddha's teachings into practice, eradicating his own greed, hatred, and delusion, until he attained his arahantship in the end.

Such is a way to make good use of one's special ability. But if you still have defilements, there's no doubt that you'll use your abilities as means for your defilements, bringing your own demise in the end, just as it happened with Devadatta.



*I experienced a near miss and during the whole time, I was reciting 'Buddho'. How should I carry on with my practice?\**

**T**ake it as something to turn your luck around or to test your mind. What was your mental state like then? If you didn't manage to let go and accept the possibility of death, just reciting 'Buddho', then your mind was still at the concentration level (*samādhī*).

That's what it is like being put to the real test. Listening to and contemplating the Dhamma are still a practice run. When you're put to the test, you'll see whether you manage to maintain your mental state. You have to keep your mind calm without any sense of perturbation in order to pass the test.

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\*I was in the BTS at Saladaeng Station when a grenade thrown in from the outside exploded. Thinking on my feet, I ducked and ran for my life. I wonder if I was able to accept the possibility of death and truly embrace 'come what may'.

You'll be able to let go and accept the possibility of death if you keep contemplating that your body is not you nor does it belong to you—it simply consists of the earthly substances.

Reciting 'Buddho' is merely at the level of samādhi. It only suppresses your fear. It is not yet at the level of wisdom (*paññā*). If it were at the level of wisdom, your insight would tell you that your body is not you or yours, allowing you to face death and its certainty when it comes knocking. If you don't train yourself in advance to accept death, your mind won't be able to take it in stride.

[When you're in such a near miss], your thoughts and your reaction can be contradicting. It all comes down to your mind—whether your mind was disturbed by it. It is alright if your reaction was simply to save your own life, not acting out of fear or wanting to survive. Ducking out of fear shows that you're not quite there yet.

It shows that you simply haven't let go. Your practice is precisely to prepare you for such a scenario, and so why would you avoid it? You were about to be put to the test. Your avoidance shows that you weren't quite ready for it. That's why you need all these excuses of thinking on your feet and postponing being put to the test. You wouldn't have run for your life if you were ready.

You can choose to react in whichever way you like if you've already let go. You can choose to save your own life or not. If you haven't, you'd only want to save it. There's no other option but to avoid that possibility. But if you have, you can choose either way depending on the circumstances.

Take any enlightened teachers for example, they can choose to see a doctor or not. They no longer have any attachment to their bodies. Those who would still seek treatments are still attached to their bodies.

So it depends whether you've overcome that test. There will be excuses for cure and treatments if you haven't. But if you have, you can then decide for yourself what to do. There's no need to explain yourself to others. You need not care about them. You know for yourself whether or not to seek treatments. You don't need to care should they criticise you for having yet to let go of your body. You know in your heart the reason, so there's no need for any explanation. What you do with your body doesn't concern anyone but you.

The most important thing is to be able to let go of your body. There won't be any problem if you have. If you haven't, your faculty of wisdom won't be able to save you from the situation. It is like two runners who are competing in a race: *kilesa* (defilement) vs. *Dhamma* (the truth). Your mind will be calm if

the Dhamma is faster, otherwise it will be ruffled. You need to train your faculty of wisdom.

That's why your teacher would always pick on you or be on your case. It is to help motivate you and train your faculty of wisdom. It always starts off slow, that is, when you first start practising, and so you need that push from your teacher. If your teacher got the knack of using wisdom, he would motivate his students by constantly intimidating and picking on them. It might be very frightful in the beginning, but your mind will react less and less, to the extent of no reaction at all, once you've developed your faculty of wisdom. Those with very unstable minds won't be able to stand it.



## *How to deal with very unrestrained defilements?*

**Y**ou have to fight them. You have to torture them. You have to fast. That's why the Buddha fasted for 49 days in order to rein them in. Fasting really helps weaken the defilements (*kilesas*)—all three types of craving will be very much subdued, unlike when you eat. The defilements usually act up when you're full. You won't want to do your walking meditation because you'd like to nap first.

There are different types of fasting: it depends on you and your surrounding. If you're alone in the woods, there will likely be only water. But if you're at a monastery, there will be some drinks in the afternoon. So it depends on how regimented you are with it.

To fast means to not consume food, to not go on alms round. But if another monk happens to drop off some food for you, such as milk, you can have it if you like. You can have honey and other juices in the afternoon if you like. It depends on your level of regimen.

Fasting makes it easier to meditate; it helps with walking meditation and cures any sleepiness while sitting. There will be more effort and determination and less laziness. You'll be more alert to any danger and mindful because you're constantly watching your own mind. Your mind will keep thinking about food while fasting so you need to keep it focussed on '*Buddho*' if you have yet learnt to contemplate.

If you know how to contemplate, you can think about food and the bodily waste. Thinking about the food that's in your mouth and stomach will help curb your craving. You won't be able to fast if you have no mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom—*sati*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*—because you'll keep thinking about and seeing all the food. If you can rein back your mind with mindfulness, then you'll be able to get into practice.

If you don't recite '*Buddho*', you'll need to contemplate food and the bodily waste. You will be able to deal with your craving once you know how to contemplate such matters. You'll only consume according to your body's need. You'll use fasting as a means for meditation practice. You won't eat like you normally do because doing so will only give you that feeling of torpor. You'll see the difference.

If you're in a monastery, fasting will allow you to be alone, not having to do chores with the community, such as going on alms

round and cleaning at the dining hall. All these chores can take up three to four hours easily, during which you can do your sitting and walking meditation and be alone instead.

Fasting is very conducive to meditation if it suits you. It can be your go-to resource until you no longer need to rely on it. If it doesn't suit you, it will stress you out and make your mind unruly. You'll be obsessed with thinking about food all the time and not meditate. If you don't meditate while fasting, you'll end up thinking about food, thus feeling hungry and insufferable. You have to keep meditating. As soon as you come out of your absorption, carry on with walking meditation to control your mind from thinking about food.

You can also recite 'Buddho' or focus your mind on walking. You may contemplate: the virtue of Dhamma; the four elements—earth, water, wind, and fire; the cycle of birth, ageing, illnesses, and death; the three marks of existence—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self; and food and bodily waste. You may alternate them as you see fit.

Your mind will develop increasingly if it focusses on the Dhamma. As soon as you feel that it is no longer calm, you can switch back to sitting meditation—reciting 'Buddho' or watching your own breath—to give your mind a rest. Your hunger and fatigue will dissipate as soon as your mind calms down. Your mind will be

revitalised and full of energy after leaving concentration. You can then carry on with your walking meditation to keep a continuous practice. You don't need to take care of anything else. The only chore is to sweep and you can meditate while sweeping, just like when you do your walking meditation by reciting 'Buddho' or contemplating the Dhamma.

If you hang out and socialise with others, you'll end up chit-chatting, conjuring up your thoughts. Your mind will still be unruly even when you're by yourself and you won't be able to meditate. If you're not mindful, you may end up looking for something else to eat. If you're constantly mindful, you'll stay focussed on meditating and forget about eating.

You're mentally fulfilled from having practised. Your physical hunger will not have any effect on your mental contentment. You'd continue to eat if your mind is still craving, even though your body is already full. That is, even when you just had a meal, you'd still have drinks. This is because your mind isn't satisfied: it hasn't been fed with the Dhamma. Therefore, it isn't at all strange to see practitioners fast continuously for quite a few days in a row at a time.

If you've never fasted before, you'd question how would one survive. After several days of fasting, you may drink something, such as *pāna* (food allowed after midday) or something sugary, to

give you energy. For those respectable teachers who camped out in the woods by themselves, people often thought that they were dead after days of fasting. They had to check on these monks after missing a few alms rounds. Those who didn't have any food with them managed to live off water alone. Their minds weren't concerned with food; they were focussed on the Dhamma practice—sitting and walking meditation. Their minds were in absorption when they weren't contemplating. This way, their minds would make continual progress.

Seeking privacy and solitude is, therefore, very important for those practitioners who aim for liberation. You'll waste your time by socialising with others as your mind will be focussed on other things—talking about worldly matters and sensual pleasures, making it difficult for your mind to calm down. If you're alone, there won't be as many distractions, and so it will consistently stick to the Dhamma. You'll be able to increasingly penetrate it, discerning even more clearly the four elements and the foulness of the body. That is, your awareness will be consistent and continuous.

You'll see the unattractiveness of one's body whenever you look at it. It will stick to your mind. As soon as your mind is lured by the physical appeal, the clearly-developed Dhamma will counter it immediately. Therefore, there won't be any sexual craving and desire, for they can only exist in your mind by feeding off your thoughts about forms and beauty.

If you think that your body is you and belongs to you, it's like feeding to your own delusion (*moha*) and ignorance (*avijjā*)—to the blindness and illusion. Contemplating the truth—that your body is not self (*anattā*): not you or yours, and that it is merely made up of the four elements: earth, water, wind, and fire—will help eradicate these misapprehensions and blindness in your heart and mind. There is no other way.

The only way to rid yourself of these illusions is through developing your faculty of wisdom (*vipassanā*). However, it needs to go hand in hand with *samādhi* in order to maintain your practice. You first have to be mindful; your mind won't be calm without mindfulness. Your defilements will be more overpowering when your mind isn't calm; they will distract you, leading you to think about worldly things, your children, your spouse, and your possessions and wealth. Your mind will get stuck thinking about them. The influence of defilements and delusions will only keep growing and lasting longer in order to keep their hold on you.

If your thoughts are in line with wisdom, they'll help loosen the grip of defilements and delusions, gradually cutting them down to nothing. Mindfulness, wisdom, and concentration are the three interrelated virtues of Dhamma; they are supported by conviction and effort (*virīya*). There need to be faith and conviction in the teachings of the Buddha. You have to put into practice what you've learnt with diligence and sustained effort.

So what does a practice entail? It entails a cultivation of mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. With these three virtues of Dhamma, liberation (*vimutti*) will surely follow. Such has been a tried and true method since the Buddha's time. Whoever uses and practises according to this method will surely reap good results. Otherwise, there won't be all these noble disciples who managed to attain enlightenment after the Buddha did until the present day.

This is because the Dhamma is timeless, that is, always relevant. It was applicable and effective then as it is still today. The only issue is that you don't put the time and effort into your practice. You might do it once a month and then complain about not making progress after five years. If that's the case, you can keep doing it at that rate for the next 100 years and still won't make any progress.



*What was your motivation?  
Was there anything in particular  
that would help me achieve  
what you have?*

**I** didn't have any motivation. All I had was diligence. You had to set your schedule and stick to it. You can set out from something small. You may start from an hour every morning and evening and increase it to two hours. You may then start doing three times a day instead of just two. The more you can let go, the more you can devote to your practice. You need to cut down on other obligations. You can't have it all, so you need to choose Dhamma over the worldly matters.

[So it all comes down to] conviction and diligence. The more you practise, the more results you'll reap, and so is the inverse. You have to believe in the teachings of the Buddha and that they are within your capability. If they weren't, the Buddha wouldn't have wasted his time to set forth his teachings. But you don't have conviction in his teachings and confidence in yourself. You

don't put enough effort in your practice because you take things for granted—overestimating your ability and not heeding his teachings. You're still deluded by your defilements. Due to your lack of wisdom and perfections, you'll keep being misguided. With such an attitude, nothing will change, even in ten lifetimes. You need to believe that what the Buddha taught is true and doable and really put it into practice.



*Is my mind defiled if contemplating the thirty-two parts of the body or the four elements makes me feel depressed and cry?*

No, your mind isn't defiled; it's only natural. What you aim to achieve is to be able to let go of your body. You need to detach yourself from your body when you're feeling such a way. That is, to contemplate it so that your mind can let go and does not cling to your body. Just carry on contemplating and you need to test yourself once you're ready. This is to see whether you're still clinging to your body. At the moment it's just a practice run. If you think you're ready, just as a boxer who is well trained to fight for a title, you need to get into the ring. Your opponent is the fear of death. Go to places that would invoke such fear. Just face it and see who would win. [If you lose], you will likely be quite shaken up but not lose your mind entirely. It shows that you haven't quite quelled it. If you have, you'd be calm, smiling, and happy.



*Where would your mind end up if you were to die while observing a calm but sad mind? How closely do you need to observe it?*

**Y**our mind isn't yet calm or fully concentrated if you still have such a feeling. If your mind is sad, then it will end up in the same fashion, and vice versa. Your feelings and emotions are the determinant: whether it will end up in a good or bad place; all depends on your mood.

You don't need to observe your mood while meditating. You should focus on reciting '*Buddho*' or watching your in-and-out breaths. Your mind won't be concentrated if you keep observing your mood. Without concentration, you'll feel agitated and upset. If you're aware of it and capable of quelling it, you should do so by reflecting on your mood with insights.

For instance, you may seek the root cause of your reactions to the things you see. You need to see that it really comes

down to your not being aware of the three marks of existence, which leads you to become attached to things. You can't help but worry and feel possessive when they come in sight, and so these negative feelings arise. You won't have any concern or feel any attachment if you are able to bear in mind that you will sooner or later part from them, and so your mental state will improve.

You need to contemplate and discern that they're all marked by the three characteristics of existence: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not you or yours. All is subject to the condition of things, which is whatever arises shall remain for a while and then cease to be. Grasping onto them will only defile your mind—giving rise to satisfaction and dissatisfaction. You need to let go and leave be. Your mood is simply an effect, so you need to figure out its root cause. Having found the cause will prevent such mood from arising, hence no uneasiness.

For example, you may feel upset due to your relationships, be they with your spouse or child. You need to take into consideration the fact that everyone is made up of the four elements and subject to ageing, illnesses, and death. These relations are merely worldly conventions, which don't ultimately hold true. The only truth is that they only consist of earthly substances and are bound to disintegrate.

You need to be able to see this truth, which is beyond the worldly conventions. You only see the worldly constructs, and not the ultimate truth. You need to penetrate the ultimate truth so that your mind will be liberated. The ultimate truth involves discerning the composition of the four elements—earth, water, wind, and fire—in things. It is the truth that transcends all conventions.

But you're limited by the conventional truths. You see these relations as your parents, as your student or mentor, as your children or spouse, and not as the four elements. You don't see that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not self. Whenever you think about or see them, an emotion immediately arises, be it pleasant or unpleasant, happy or sad, or indifferent. This kind of indifference is not out of equanimity. It's because you neither like nor dislike it, thus being indifferent. Such is not the case of being equanimous—being able to let go. To 'leave be', in an equanimous sense, you need to see them as merely consisting of earth, water, wind, and fire. It is to see them as being subject to the cycle of birth, ageing, illnesses, and death; and as inheriting the three marks of existence: impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). Being able to do so, your mind will be calm and remain equanimous with whatever comes in sight.



*Should you only focus on one particular subject when meditating in order to contemplate things at all times?*

**I**t's like doing your homework, which is for practising—to prepare yourself in advance. So when you're put to the test in a real situation, you'll see whether you can manage to see for what it is. For instance, when you get told off, can you just shrug it off? That is, are you able to discern that it was just a sound? To regard it as something that is bound to arise and pass away—impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not self.

There are three levels of wisdom (*paññā*). First is *sutta-maya-paññā*—a kind that arises from listening to the Dhamma just as you are at the moment. Second is *cintā-maya-paññā*—a kind that derives from contemplating regularly the Dhamma one has heard. For example, you might train yourself to get used to other people's criticism, so that you'll be unaffected when it actually happens. Third is *bhāvanā-maya-paññā*—a kind that can be

applied in real time. You can just smile and shrug it off when you get told off. You'll be able to get through it if you're keenly aware of the situation, that is, you can deal with and accept it as soon as something happens. You can readily put an end to your defilement as soon as it appears; then that is considered bhāvanā-maya-paññā.

At the level of wisdom that is derived from contemplation, cintā-maya-paññā, you'll lose it entirely when something happens. Your mind will be ruffled, forgetting entirely all of your effort and practice. So you will hit the roof when there's anger. This is a test for your level of wisdom, whether it is a kind that is derived from contemplation or practice. At the level of bhāvanā-maya-paññā, you'll be able to handle any type of situation as you'll readily discern its inherent nature of the three marks of existence. You'll know that it is something you need to let go and leave be.

You'll have to devise your own technique as to how to get to that level. For instance, you may treat it as children's mistake. You can't hold it against them; you can only let them be. You don't usually get upset by the things children do; for example, you don't mind their tantrums. Why can't you view your partner or spouse as a child? You can then leave them be if you see them in such light. You need to come up with your own way to handle these situations as you're all different.

These mental techniques, to do with the wisdom faculty, can be wide-ranging whereas concentration (*samādhi*) isn't. You just need to be aware of your meditation subject in order to get your mind concentrated. There are different levels of wisdom, ranging from coarse to intermediate and subtle. At a coarse level, it concerns the externals, which are forms, sounds, odours, flavours, and touch. At an intermediate level, it has to do with the five aggregates (*khandhas*): forms (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), memories (*saññā*), thoughts (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). At a subtle level, it is to do with the mind.

You have to tune out all the externals before getting into the inner level. Renunciants, who are able to shut out the externals—turning away from forms, sounds, odours, flavours, and touch as well as wealth and possessions, can focus on the five khandhas. Contemplation of forms, feelings, memories, thoughts, and consciousness to the level of detachment will allow them to access their mental basis (*citta*) where they'll find the subtlest forms of defilements.

You won't be able to get rid of your defilements if you're a beginner. It is useless for beginners to readily observe their minds as they're still attached to their senses: forms, sounds, odours, and flavours. You'll be fooled by your own defilements to do things, such as buying drinks and going to places. Defilements are keen on this type of mind; they are still very much in control of the mind as it isn't yet calm.

To observe your mind in order to develop your mindfulness, you need to be aware of your thoughts, be they positive or negative. You need to stop those negative thoughts. If you're not reciting '*Buddho*', then you're being unmindful. For those who use 'Buddho' as their meditation subject, you'll be reciting it from the moment you awake until you fall asleep if you're truly mindful. If you're not reciting, then it is clear that you've lost track of your mindfulness.

If your meditation subject is the thirty-two parts of the body, then you have to constantly be contemplating your hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, etc. In the beginning you should set your awareness on your body because it is much easier than to set it on your mind. The body is coarser than the mind—something that is observable with just plain eyes. You have to engage your mind to your body—your mind is constantly present with your body—and not let it wander. Your mind shouldn't be thinking about something in Bangkok while your body is here.

Your mind is consistently aware of your body, whether you're walking, eating, or taking a bath. If you can manage that, then you're being mindful as your mind hasn't gone astray. When you put it to watch your breathing or recite '*Buddho*', it would. If you can manage to do that for about five to ten minutes, then your mind will calm down and become absorbed.

It would be beneficial if you don't let your mind get involved with the externals. If it happens to drift away, you should refocus it, reminding yourself that it is inadvisable to get distracted by other things and that your priority is to establish calmness for the mind. If you let your mind wander, it won't be calm. After your practice, you won't feel the effect of meditation or have the will to resist your defilements. As soon as you come into contact with any sensual stimuli, your defilements will be readily activated.

With a calm mind, impervious to things, you'll be able to resist your defilements. Seeing things won't immediately conjure defilements. You'll have the time to contemplate these phenomena and their nature with your calm and undisturbed mind—to cultivate wisdom (*vipassanā*). Your mental calm will weaken after developing wisdom for a while. Your contemplation won't be as effective as before due to the arising of defilements, and so you need to get back to your mental absorption.

Samādhi and paññā take turn in their workings—they support one another. Samādhi is a resting state of the mind while paññā is its working mode. Mental cultivation through meditation practice is just like your daily routine: leaving home to go to work in the morning, coming back home to rest in the evening, and starting all over again the next morning. When you come out of your absorption, you contemplate the three marks of existence and the five aggregates. Once it is no longer effective,

you then get into your concentration to give your mind a rest. Your mind will automatically withdraw from samādhi when it is fully recharged; you can then start contemplating again.

Repeating this cycle consistently will hone your wisdom faculty, making it more in tune with your defilements. You'll be able to readily detect any thoughts that aren't in line with the truth. You'll be aware of your attraction to things, longing to live forever, and aversion to sickness. You'll be able to quell these defilements promptly, that is, your mind is able to detach itself.



*How did you manage to stick to yourself and get by on your own when you were at Wat Pa Baan Taad?*

**I**t was the mental calm that helped me. You have to fight it. It is like climbing a mountain: you'll feel elated once there. You just have to keep up with it.

[You need to] look for a teacher. You must be prepared and ready first. If not, you have to keep staying with your teacher.

You need a teacher to guide and motivate you in the beginning. You need to establish that calmness in your mind first and then you can go and be by yourself. To do so is like taking an exam. If you have already gained the first two levels of wisdom—*sutta-maya-paññā* and *cintā-maya-paññā*—and you'd like to test the level of your *bhāvanā-maya-paññā*, you'd have to try being on your own. It is to test yourself on a higher level of practice.

You need to have already established a level of mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom to take care of yourself in order for your teacher to allow you. You shouldn't be on your own if you haven't gained these faculties. You're still like a baby who needs to be taken care of and taught by its parents. You can take off once you've grown up and can take care of yourself.

That's the point of having a teacher. You can consult him as soon as you run into a problem; he can readily help address your issue. Your mind isn't yet capable enough and still lacks the insight, that is, it is only full of defilements that deter your conviction and motivation for meditation practice.

Your teacher will give you teachings on a regular basis. When I was with Luangta Mahā Boowa, there weren't many visitors. He would call a meeting every four to five days to give us a teaching. I gained a lot of motivation after listening to his teachings. I could do several hours of walking meditation after each meeting. I would get tired after an hour of walking from not feeling motivated on the day when there was no Dhamma talk. It made such a difference. I gained a lot of encouragement after listening to his Dhamma, but it faded after a few days. That's why he had to call these meetings on a regular basis.

The Buddha set Uposatha day for lay people to visit monasteries so that they can replenish their Dhamma and wisdom. It is to

re-nourish their minds to help them face their own trials and tribulations. Uposatha day is the day for listening to the Dhamma as it brings so much benefits for those who do it on a regular basis, *'kalena dhamma savanaṃ etam maṇigalamuttamaṃ'*.

I told you last time to listen to the Dhamma every day. You should listen to it after you get up, before going to work. Have you ever got up or gone to bed an hour earlier than usual to do so? This is to have time to sit in meditation and listen to the Dhamma before going to work, so that you have the Dhamma as your guidance.

Listening to the Dhamma everyday would make a huge difference—having the Dhamma to guide you instead of your defilements. With your mind full of kilesas, they will urge you to do things that make your mind uneasy, restless, and agitated—giving you grief. With the Dhamma, you'll be able to manage, knowing that it is only expected for things to arise and cease. Both calm and chaos are bound to exist and alternate. There is no need to get yourself entangled in them. You can detach yourself from them with the Dhamma—using mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

You need to practise on a daily basis in order to maintain your mental well-being. You should do whatever you can. If you can make merit, just do it. If you can make donations, then do it.

If you can help someone, so do it. You should commit yourself to not harming anyone verbally and physically. No matter how badly others may behave, just let them. There's no need to say anything; it won't do you any good. It will only make you just as bad as they are. You need to remain calm and equanimous, always full of compassion. You need to bear in mind '*sabbe sattā*', which entails all sentient beings, including those that are for and against you. It needs to be inclusive of everyone, the red shirts, the yellow shirts, and those of other colours.\* We are all in it together—in this cycle of birth, ageing, illnesses, and death.

With compassion (*mettā*), there will be much fewer issues as it takes two to tango. You should apply these Dhamma principles; all the issues will be much less aggravated. It will only get worse if each side is projecting its anger and hatred towards the other.




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\*This refers to the political crisis in Thailand.

*Should I continue to contemplate death after being scared by it once? And how do I put it to the test?*

**Y**ou should carry on contemplating until you're no longer fearful of it. Your body is just the same as the dead ones. Just observe it until you can accept death and then you have to put it to the test.

You have to look for places or situations that would really put you to the test—to check your fear of death. You might be fooling yourself that you're not afraid of dying because you have yet to encounter a real situation.

~

*Are sati and sampajañña,  
mindfulness and awareness,  
respectively?*

**A**wareness is not '*sampajañña*'. *Sampajañña* is a continuous state of mindfulness (*sati*). Awareness is the one who knows. When the mind enters into singularity and becomes one, awareness will appear. The one who knows is already there, but you don't see it. When the mind is active, you cannot see the one who knows. When the mind stops all its activities, the one who knows will appear.

~

*Is it possible to make Luangta Mahā Boowa live longer if all his students were to pool together their effort and practice?\**

**I**t's not possible. His body is subject to its own causes and conditions. [The merit of a well-trained mind] applies to the one who practises.

You may offer it, but it doesn't guarantee that the outcome will be according to your wish. Such an offering is a gesture of respect. He doesn't want anything from you, nothing at all. He is fully self-sufficient. His body is not him; it's just like a vehicle. It won't run when it becomes obsolete. The body is like a car: it will fall apart when it's time. No one can prevent it. If one could extend another person's life through merit-making, the Buddha would still be living today.

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\*Can such an offering have an effect on him, just like Venerable Ānanda could have requested the Buddha to stay longer? Does it have anything to do with the four bases of mental power: purpose, effort, mind, and investigation?

In the case of *Venerable Ānanda*, the Buddha meant that his body could still last and he would be able to live with an extra care. Without such a care, it would expire sooner. The Buddha tried to let Venerable Ānanda know, as it would require him to care for the Buddha, but Venerable Ānanda didn't clue in and let that opportunity pass. Venerable Ānanda himself was reprimanded three months after the Buddha's death when there was a congregation of the five-hundred noble disciples to agree on the Buddha's teachings. Venerable Ānanda said he didn't understand what the Buddha had meant when he could have pleaded with the Buddha to stay longer.

The four bases of mental power (*iddhipāda*), consisting of purpose (*chanda*), effort (*virīya*), mind (*citta*), and investigation (*vīmaṃsā*) are the power of the Dhamma, which will help sustain the body longer, in comparison to the mind that is without the will or power to live on. The body can be in a good shape but it won't be able to go on if the mind doesn't care for the body. It won't make the body eat, sleep, exercise, and take medications. A neglected body is bound to deteriorate rather quickly.

This is contrary to a body that is well taken care of—being full of will and energy because it is the mind that looks after the body. The Buddha had the will to look after his body, but he would also need the help of others. Without an assistant, he wouldn't be able to make it. The assistant, himself, would have to devote his own time.

Venerable Ānanda, at the time, had yet to attain enlightenment and so the Buddha didn't want to detract him from his path. He wanted to let Venerable Ānanda practise as he wished. If he wanted to continue being the Buddha's attendant, it would have to be out of his own will. Without a proper offer for his service, it was construed as unwilling. Venerable Ānanda wasn't wise enough to catch on to the Buddha's words and when he did, it was already too late; the Buddha only had three months by then. The Buddha wouldn't change his mind once it had already been made up.

[The four bases of mental power to save his body] refer to his willingness (*chanda*) to live for the sake of others or the world. It's out of his empathy and compassion for those in need. Even on the very last night before he went onto the final realm, he was still teaching and answering to the very last person. Venerable Ānanda didn't allow that person to see the Buddha, but the Buddha insisted on letting the person in to see him. This was out of his boundless compassion for all sentient beings.

The Buddha had already made up his mind about leaving and wouldn't change it. He took into consideration the number of five-hundred-some noble disciples who would carry on teaching on his behalf. He was certain that all the sentient beings won't be without a refuge. He said, 'You all won't be without a teacher, for it is my teachings—*Dhamma-Vinaya*—that will be your teacher'.



*Venerable Ānanda seeing to the Buddha*

All the noble disciples, with the minimum of five-hundred of them, would be the ones who carried out the teaching of Dhamma-Vinaya.

So don't overreact when it comes to any teacher's passing. It is just a matter of time, which is only natural and expected.

All Luangta's teachings have already been recorded, which will be just as useful whether he is still alive or not. When you visit any teacher, it is not to see his body but to seek out his Dhamma. So why don't you seek out and listen to his Dhamma which is still available?











# *Biography*

**P**hra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto was born on 2 November 1947. His father put him under the care of his grandmother, who was living in Suphanburi, when he was two years old due to his father's demanding work schedule.

Phra Ajahn Suchart had an interest in the Dhamma since he was in grade school at the Seventh Day Adventist Ekamai School in Bangkok, which is now Ekamai International School. After graduating high school, he went to study Civil Engineering at California State University, Fresno (USA). He returned to Thailand once he had completed his degree and was running an ice-cream parlour for a short while.

An English Dhamma book on impermanence (*anicca*)—translated by a foreign monk from the Buddhist Canon (*Tipiṭaka*)—inspired him to search for a true happiness through ordination. Phra Ajahn Suchart decided to become a monk when he was 27 years of age. He was ordained at Wat Bovornives in Bangkok on 19 February 1975 with Somdet Phra Nāṇasaṅvara—the late Supreme Patriarch (Somdet Phra Saṅgharājā)—as his preceptor. His parents had no objection to his ordination as it was his choice.

About six weeks after ordination, Phra Ajahn Suchart travelled to Wat Pa Baan Taad to stay for the rains retreat with Luangta Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno in Udon Thani. He stayed there for nine years from his first to his ninth rains retreat. After his time at Wat Pa Baan Taad, Phra Ajahn Suchart returned to Pattaya and stayed at Wat Bodhi Sampan, Chonburi, for one year. He then moved to Wat Yansangwararam in 1984 and has resided there until present. Phra Ajahn Suchart was conferred a monastic title along with an emblematic fan on 5 December 1993.

















# *Glossary*

<i>Ajaan, Ajahn</i>	(Thai). Teacher. Mentor. Equivalent to the Pāli ācariya.
<i>anāgāmi</i>	Non-returner. A person who has abandoned the five lower fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth (saṃyojana), and who after death will appear in one of the Brahma worlds called the Pure Abodes, there to attain nibbāna, never again to return to this world.
<i>Ānanda</i>	A first cousin of Gautama Buddha and one of his ten principal disciples. Amongst the Buddha's many disciples, Ānanda stood out for having the most retentive memory. Most of the suttas of the Sutta Piṭaka are attributed to his recollection of the Buddha's teachings during the First Buddhist council. For that reason, he was known as the Guardian of the Dhamma.
<i>anattā</i>	Non-self. One of the essential doctrines and a part of three marks of existence. The doctrine that there is in humans no permanent, underlying substance that can be called the soul. Instead, the individual is compounded of five aggregates (khandhas) that are constantly changing.
<i>Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta</i>	'The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic'. Traditionally recorded as the second discourse delivered by the Buddha to the five renunciants (pañcavaggiyā).
<i>Angulimāla</i>	A ruthless serial killer who was redeemed by a sincere conversion to Buddhism. He is seen as an example of the redemptive power of the Buddha's teaching and the universal human potential for spiritual progress, regardless of one's background.
<i>anicca</i>	Inconstant, unsteady, impermanent. Impermanence is one of the essential doctrines and a part of three marks of existence. The doctrine asserts that all of conditioned existence, without exception, is 'transient, evanescent, and inconstant'. All temporal things, whether material or mental, are compounded objects in a continuous change of condition, subject to decline and destruction.
<i>Aññā Koṇḍañña</i>	One of the five renunciants (pañcavaggiyā) who is known as the foremost of the five initial disciples of the Buddha. Koṇḍañña was

the first to comprehend the teaching and thus became the first bhikkhu and arahant.

<i>apāya-bhūmi</i>	State of deprivation. The four lower levels of existence into which one might be reborn as a result of past unskillful actions: rebirth in hell, as a hungry ghost (peta), as an angry demon (asura), or as a common animal. None of these states is permanent.
<i>arahant</i>	A worthy one or pure one. A person whose mind is free of defilement (kilesa), who has abandoned all ten of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth (saṃyojana), whose heart is free of mental effluents (āsava), and who is thus not destined for further rebirth. A title for the Buddha and the highest level of his noble disciples.
<i>ariya-magga</i>	The Noble Path.
<i>ariya-phala</i>	Fruition of the Noble Path.
<i>arūpa-jhāna</i>	Formless meditation. A state of strong concentration focussed on a mental notion. There are four successive levels of meditation on non-material objects.
<i>arūpa-rāga</i>	Lust for immaterial existence or rebirth in a formless realm. One of the ten fetters.
<i>asubha</i>	Unattractiveness, loathsomeness, foulness. The Buddha recommends contemplation of this aspect of the body (asubha-kammaṭṭhāna—one of the forty meditation subjects) as an antidote to lust and complacency.
<i>attā</i>	The concept of self.
<i>avijjā</i>	Unawareness, ignorance, obscured awareness, delusion about one's own true nature.
<i>baan</i>	(Thai). Village.
<i>bhava</i>	Becoming. States of being that develop first in the mind and can then be experienced as internal worlds and/or as worlds on an

external level. There are three levels of becoming: the sensual level, the level of form, and the level of formlessness. Bhava is listed as the tenth of the Twelve Links (nidānas) of Dependent Origination (paṭiccasamuppāda).

<i>bhava-jāti</i>	States of existence and birth.
<i>bhava-taṇhā</i>	Craving for existence; craving to have or to be. One of the three types of craving (taṇhā).
<i>bhāvanā</i>	Mental cultivation or development. Meditation practice. The third of the three grounds for meritorious action, together with giving (dāna) and precepts (sila).
<i>bhāvanā-maya-paññā</i>	Experiential wisdom. Understanding based on mental development. One of the three types of wisdom.
<i>brahmā</i>	Great One. An inhabitant of the non-sensual heavens of form or formlessness.
<i>Buddha</i>	The name given to one who rediscovers for himself the liberating path of Dhamma, after a long period of its having been forgotten by the world. According to tradition, a long line of Buddhas stretches off into the distant past. The most recent Buddha was born Siddhattha Gotama in India in the sixth century BCE. A well-educated and wealthy young man, he relinquished his family and his princely inheritance in the prime of his life to search for true freedom and an end to suffering (dukkha). After seven years of austerities in the forest, he rediscovered the 'middle way' and achieved his goal, becoming Buddha.
<i>Buddha Ariya Metteya</i>	A future Buddha of this world in Buddhist eschatology. A bodhisattva who will appear on Earth in the future, achieve complete enlightenment, and teach the pure dhamma. A successor to the present Buddha, Gautama Buddha. The prophecy of the arrival of Buddha Ariya Metteya refers to a time in the future when the dhamma will have been forgotten by most on the terrestrial world.
<i>Buddho</i>	Awake, enlightened. A traditional epithet for the Buddha,

	‘Buddho’ is a preparatory meditation word ( <i>parikamma</i> ) that is repeated mentally while reflecting on the Buddha’s special qualities. In its simplest form, one focusses attention exclusively on the repetition of ‘Buddho’, continuously thinking the word ‘Buddho’ while in meditation. One should simply be aware of each repetition of ‘Buddho, Buddho, Buddho’ to the exclusion of all else. Once it becomes continuous, this simple repetition will produce results of peace and calm in the heart.
<i>chanda</i>	Will, aspiration, the will to do, resolve, zeal, desire, impulse, wish, loving interest, desire for truth and understanding. One of the four spiritual powers ( <i>iddhipāda</i> ).
<i>chedi</i>	Stupa. Thūpa in Pāli. Originally, a tumulus or burial mound enshrining relics of a holy person—such as the Buddha—or objects associated with his life. Over the centuries this has developed into the tall, spired monuments familiar in temples in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma.
<i>cintā-maya-paññā</i>	Wisdom or knowledge based on thinking. One of the three types of wisdom.
<i>citta</i>	Mind, heart, state of consciousness. The underlying essence of mind where Dhamma and the kilesas dwell. In its pure state, it is indefinable. It is beyond birth and death. It controls the khandhas, but does not die when they do. One of the four spiritual powers ( <i>iddhipāda</i> ).
<i>dāna</i>	Generosity, giving, liberality, offering, alms. Specifically, giving of any of the four requisites to the monastic order. More generally, the inclination to give, without any expectation of the reward.
<i>deva (devatā)</i>	Shining one—an inhabitant of the heavenly realms.
<i>Devadatta</i>	A cousin of the Buddha who tried to effect a schism in the saṅgha and who has since become emblematic for all Buddhists who work knowingly or unknowingly to undermine the religion from within.
<i>Dhamma</i>	The truth of the way things are. The teachings of the Buddha that

reveal the truth and elucidate the means of realising it as a direct phenomenon.

*dhamma*

(1) Event, a phenomenon in and of itself; (2) mental quality; (3) the teachings of the Buddha; (4) nibbāna. Also, principles of behaviour that human beings ought to follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realise the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By extension, 'Dhamma' (usu. capitalised) is used also to denote any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha denotes both his teachings and the direct experience of nibbāna, the quality at which those teachings are aimed.

*Dhamma-cakkappavattana Sutta*

'The Discourse on the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dhamma'. A Buddhist text considered to be a record of the first teaching given by the Buddha after he attained enlightenment. According to tradition, the Buddha gave this teaching in Sarnath, India, to the five ascetics (his former companions with whom he had spent six years practising austerities). The main topic of this Sutta is the Four Noble Truths, which are the central teachings of Buddhism that provide a unifying theme, or conceptual framework, for all of Buddhist thought. This Sutta also introduces the Buddhist concepts of the middle way, impermanence, and dependent origination.

*Dhamma-Vinaya*

Doctrine (dhamma) and Discipline (vinaya). The Buddha's own name for the religion he founded.

*dukkha*

Suffering, pain, discontent. The unsatisfactory nature of all phenomena. Dukkha is the condition of fundamental discontent that is inherent within the very nature of all sentient existence. Essentially, it is the underlying sense of dissatisfaction that ultimately undermines even the most pleasant experiences, for everything in the phenomenal world is subject to change and therefore unreliable. Thus, all of saṃsāric existence is characterised by dukkha. The first of the Four Noble Truths.

*dukkha-sacca*

Truth about suffering.

*dukkha-vedanā*

Painful feeling, unpleasant feeling.

<i>ekaggatārammaṇa</i>	Singleness of preoccupation. One-pointedness. In meditation, the mental quality that allows one's attention to remain collected and focussed on the chosen meditation object. Ekagattārammaṇa reaches full maturity upon the development of the fourth level of jhāna.
<i>iddhipāda</i>	A group/base of spiritual powers (mental qualities): intention, effort, consciousness, and investigation. These four base/mental qualities are used to develop wholesome mental states and rid oneself of unwholesome mental states.
<i>jāti</i>	Birth; the arising of a new living entity within the cyclic existence (saṃsāra). Jāti is identified as an aspect of suffering (dukkha) within the teachings on the Four Noble Truths and as the eleventh link within the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination.
<i>jhāna</i>	Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focussed on a single physical sensation (resulting in rūpa jhāna) or mental notion (resulting in arūpa jhāna). Development of jhāna arises from the temporary suspension of the five hindrances (nīvaraṇa) through the development of five mental factors: directed thought (vitakka), evaluation (vicāra), rapture (pīti), pleasure (sukha), and singleness of preoccupation (ekaggatārammaṇa).
<i>kāma-rāga</i>	Sensual lust. One of the ten fetters.
<i>kāma-sukha</i>	Sensual pleasures.
<i>kāma-taṇhā</i>	Craving for sensual pleasures. One of the three types of craving.
<i>kamma</i>	Intentional acts that result in states of being and birth.
<i>kaṭhina</i>	A ceremony, held in the fourth month of the rainy season, in which a saṅgha of bhikkhus receives a gift of cloth from lay people, bestows it on one of their members, and then makes it into a robe before dawn of the following day.
<i>kāya</i>	Body. Kāya usually refers to the physical body.
<i>khandha</i>	Group or aggregate. In the plural, khandhas refer to the five

physical and mental components of personality (body, feelings, memory, thoughts, consciousness) and to the sensory experience in general (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations). Also known as ‘aggregates of attachment’ because they are the objects of a craving for personal existence, they are, in fact, simply classes of natural phenomena that continuously arise and cease and are devoid of any enduring self-identity whatsoever.

*kilesa*

Mental defilement. Kilesas are negative psychological and emotional forces existing within the hearts and minds of all living beings. These defilements are of three basic types: greed, hatred, and delusion. All of them are ingenerate pollutants that contaminate the way people think, speak, and act, and thus corrupt from within the very intention and purpose of their existence, binding them (through the inevitable consequences of their actions) ever more firmly to the perpetual cycle of rebirth. Their manifestations are many and varied. They include passion, jealousy, envy, conceit, vanity, pride, stinginess, arrogance, anger, resentment, including all sorts of more subtle variations that invariably produce the unwholesome and harmful states of mind which are responsible for so much human misery. These various kilesa-driven mental states interact and combine to create patterns of conduct that perpetuate people’s suffering and give rise to all of the world’s disharmony.

*kilesa-taṇhā*

Craving and desire

*kuṭī*

An abode of a Buddhist monk or novice. Hut or home for a monk.

*Luangpu*

(Thai). Venerable (paternal) Grandfather. A reverential term for an elderly monk, such as Luangpu Mun.

*Luangta*

(Thai). Venerable (maternal) Grandfather. A reverential term for an elderly monk, such as Luangta Mahā Boowa.

*magga*

Path. Magga usually refers to the eight-fold path leading to nibbāna. Specifically, the path to the cessation of suffering and stress.

*Māgha-pūja*

The third lunar month (māgha) and to venerate (pūja). An important Buddhist festival celebrated on the full moon day of

the third lunar month to venerate the Buddha and his teachings. It marks the four auspicious occasions, occurring at the Veḷuvana bamboo grove, ten months after the enlightenment of the Buddha: 1,250 disciples came to see the Buddha that evening without being summoned; all of them were arahants; all were ordained by the Buddha himself (ehibhikkhus); and it was the full-moon day.

<i>Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta</i>	‘The Great Discourse on the Establishing of Mindfulness’. One of the two most important and widely studied discourses in the Pāli Canon of Theravada Buddhism, acting as the foundation for mindfulness meditation practice.
<i>māna</i>	Conceit. One of the ten fetters.
<i>Mangala Sutta</i>	The Discourse on Blessings.
<i>mettā</i>	Loving-kindness, friendliness, pure love, goodwill. One of the ten perfections (pāramīs) and one of the four ‘sublime abodes’ (brahma-vihāra).
<i>michā-diṭṭhi</i>	Wrong view.
<i>moha</i>	Delusion; ignorance (avijjā). One of three unwholesome roots (mūla) in the mind.
<i>nāma-khandha</i>	Mental phenomena (nāma) and aggregate (khandha). A collective term for the mental components of the five khandhas: feelings (vedanā), perception (saññā), thoughts (saṅkhāra), and consciousness (viññāṇa).
<i>nāma-rūpa</i>	Name-and-form, mind-and-matter, mentality-physicality. The union of mental phenomena (nāma) and physical phenomena (rūpa), conditioned by consciousness (viññāṇa) in the causal chain of dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda).
<i>nibbāna</i>	Extinguished. The unbinding of the mind from the mental effluents (āsavas), defilements (kilesas), the round of rebirth (vaṭṭa), and from all that can be described or defined. As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries the connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. That is to say, the threefold fire of

greed, hatred, and delusion goes out in the heart due to lack of fuel. The extinguishing of this fire frees the mind from everything that binds it to the cycle of rebirth and the suffering experienced therein. Nibbāna represents absolute freedom, the supreme happiness—the ultimate goal of the Buddhist training.

*nirodha* Cessation, disbanding, stopping. The third of the Four Noble Truths.

*nīvaraṇa* Five hindrances to concentration—sensual desire; ill will; sloth and drowsiness; restlessness and anxiety; and uncertainty.

*pa* (Thai). Forest.

*Pāli* An ancient variant of Sanskrit. Pāli is the literary language of the early Buddhists and the language in which the texts of the original Buddhist Canon (Tipiṭaka) are preserved.

*pañcavaggiyā* The name given to a group of five renunciants to whom the Buddha preached his first sermon at Isipatana; they all became monks and attained enlightenment: Koṇḍañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji.

*paññā* Wisdom, discernment, insight, intelligence, common sense, ingenuity. One of the ten perfections (pāramīs).

*pāpa* Infertile, barren, harmful, bringing ill fortune. Demerit. Bad actions (kamma).

*paramaṇi sukhaṃ* Sublime happiness.

*paramaṇi suññaṃ* Sublime voidness.

*pāramī* Perfection of the character. A group of ten qualities developed over many lifetimes by a Bodhisattva, which appears in the Pāli Canon (Tipiṭaka)—only in the Jātaka tales: generosity (dāna), virtue (sīla), renunciation (nekkhamma), discernment (paññā), energy/persistence (viriya), patience/forbearance (khanti), truthfulness (sacca), determination (adhiṭṭhāna), good will (mettā), and equanimity (upekkhā).

<i>pariyatti</i>	Theoretical understanding of Dhamma obtained through reading, studying, and learning.
<i>paṭigha</i>	Anger. One of the ten fetters.
<i>paṭipatti</i>	The practice of Dhamma, as opposed to mere theoretical knowledge.
<i>paṭivedha</i>	Direct, first-hand realisation of the Dhamma.
<i>phala</i>	Fruition. Specifically, the fruition of any of the four transcendent paths.
<i>Phra</i>	(Thai). Venerable. Used as a prefix to the name of a monk.
<i>puñña</i>	Merit, meritorious action, virtue . The inner sense of well-being that comes from having acted rightly or well and that enables one to continue acting well.
<i>rāga-taṇhā</i>	Sexual craving.
<i>rūpa</i>	Body, physical phenomenon, appearance, form.
<i>rūpa-jhāna</i>	Form meditation. A state of strong concentration focussed on a single physical sensation or object. There are four successive levels of meditation in which the mind is focussed on a material object.
<i>rūpa-khandha</i>	Physical form (rūpa) and aggregate (khandha). A collective term for the physical components of personality and the sensory experience in general (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations).
<i>rūpa-rāga</i>	Lust for material existence or material rebirth.
<i>sakadāgāmi</i>	Once-returner. A person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth, has weakened the fetters of sensual passion and resistance, and who after death is destined to be reborn in this world only once more.
<i>sakkāya-diṭṭhi</i>	Self-identification view. The view that mistakenly identifies any of the aggregates as 'self'. The first of the ten fetters (saṃyojana).

	Abandonment of <i>sakkāya-diṭṭhi</i> is one of the hallmarks of stream-entry ( <i>soṭāpanna</i> ).
<i>sālā</i>	(Thai). Meeting hall in a monastery. A hall where the monks can meet and eat. The hall is also used for acts within the Saṅgha and for Dhamma talks.
<i>samādhi</i>	Concentration, mental absorption, meditative calm. The practice of centering the mind on a single object, having many levels and types.
<i>samatha-bhāvanā</i>	Mental cultivation or meditation practice with a focus on developing concentration and calming the mind.
<i>sammā-diṭṭhi</i>	Right view. The first of the eight path factors in the Noble Eightfold Path, belonging to the wisdom division of the path.
<i>sampajañña</i>	Clear comprehension, clear knowing, constant thorough understanding of impermanence, fully alert, full awareness.
<i>samudaya</i>	The cause/arising of suffering ( <i>dukkha</i> ). The second of the Four Noble Truths.
<i>saṃyojana</i>	Fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth ( <i>vaṭṭa</i> )—self-identification views ( <i>sakkāya-diṭṭhi</i> ), uncertainty ( <i>vicikicchā</i> ), grasping at precepts and practices ( <i>silabbata-parāmāsa</i> ); sensual passion ( <i>kāma-rāga</i> ), resistance ( <i>vyāpāda/paṭigha</i> ); passion for form ( <i>rūpa-rāga</i> ), passion for formless phenomena ( <i>arūpa-rāga</i> ), conceit ( <i>māna</i> ), restlessness ( <i>uddhacca</i> ), and unawareness ( <i>avijjā</i> ).
<i>Saṅgha</i>	The community of the Buddha's disciples. On the conventional level, this means the Buddhist monastic order. On the ideal level, it refers to those of the Buddha's followers, whether lay or ordained, who have attained at least the first of the four transcendent paths culminating in arahantship ( <i>nibbāna</i> ).
<i>saṅkhāra</i>	Thoughts. Mental formation, compound, fashioning, and fabrication—the forces and factors that fashion things (physical or mental). <i>Saṅkhāra</i> can refer to anything formed or fashioned by conditions, or more specifically, thought-formations within the

	mind—as one of the five aggregates (khandhas).
<i>saññā</i>	Label, perception, allusion, act of memory or recognition, interpretation. The third of the five aggregates (khandhas).
<i>sarong</i>	(Thai). Wrapping cloth to cover the lower body.
<i>sāsana-dhamma</i>	Message. The dispensation, doctrine, and legacy of the Buddha.
<i>sati</i>	Mindfulness, self-collectedness, powers of reference and retention. In some contexts, the word 'sati' when used alone covers alertness (sampajañña) as well.
<i>silā</i>	Virtue, morality, moral behaviour. The training precepts restraining one from performing unskilful actions. Sila is the first of the three grounds for meritorious action, together with giving (dāna) and cultivation through practice (bhāvanā).
<i>silabbata-parāmāsa</i>	Attachment to rites and rituals. One of the ten fetters.
<i>sotāpanna</i>	Stream enterer. A person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth (saṃyojana) and has thus entered the 'stream' flowing inexorably to nibbāna, ensuring that one will be reborn at most only seven more times, and only into human or higher realms.
<i>sotāpatti-phala</i>	Fruition of having attained the stream entry.
<i>sukha-vedanā</i>	Pleasant sensations; pleasant feelings.
<i>sutta-maya-paññā</i>	Wisdom obtained from listening to others and reading sacred texts. One of the three types of wisdom.
<i>Tan, Than</i>	(Thai). Reverend, venerable.
<i>taṇhā</i>	Craving—craving for sensuality, for becoming, and for not becoming. The chief cause of dukkha.
<i>tilakkhaṇa</i>	Three marks of existence. Three characteristics inherent

in all conditioned phenomena—impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*).

<i>Tipiṭaka</i>	The Buddhist Pāli Canon. Literally, ‘three baskets’ in reference to the three principal divisions of the Canon: the disciplinary rules ( <i>Vinaya Piṭaka</i> ), discourses ( <i>Sutta Piṭaka</i> ), and abstract philosophical treatises ( <i>Abhidhamma Piṭaka</i> ).
<i>uddhacca</i>	Restlessness; one of the ten fetters.
<i>upadāna</i>	Clinging, attachment, sustenance for becoming and birth—attachment to sensuality, to views, to precepts and practices, and to theories of the self.
<i>upekkhā</i>	Equanimity. One of the ten perfections ( <i>pāramīs</i> ) and one of the four ‘sublime abodes’ ( <i>brahma-vihāras</i> ).
<i>uposatha</i>	(Thai). Religious hall. Observance day, corresponding to the phases of the moon, on which Buddhist lay people gather to listen to the Dhamma and to observe special precepts. On the new-moon and full-moon uposatha days monks assemble to recite the <i>Pāṭimokkha</i> rules.
<i>vassa</i>	Rains Retreat. A three-month period from July to October, corresponding roughly to the rainy season, in which each monk is required to live settled in a single place and not wander freely about.
<i>vaṭṭa</i>	The cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This denotes both the death and rebirth of living beings and the death and rebirth of defilement ( <i>kilesa</i> ) within the mind.
<i>vedanā</i>	Feeling—pleasure ( <i>sukha</i> ), pain ( <i>dukkha</i> ), or neither pleasure nor pain.
<i>vibhava-taṇhā</i>	Craving for non-existence, craving not to have or not to be. One of the three types of craving ( <i>taṇhā</i> ).
<i>vicikicchā</i>	Sceptical doubt. One of the five hindrances ( <i>nīvaraṇa</i> ), one of the three mental chains ( <i>saṃyojana</i> ). It also applies to uncertainty whether things are advantageous or not, to be practised or not, of

	high or low value, etc.
<i>vihāra</i>	Abode.
<i>vimamsā</i>	Investigation or discrimination. One of the four spiritual powers (iddhipāda).
<i>vimutti</i>	Release, freedom from the fabrications and conventions of the mind. The suttas distinguish between two kinds of release: discernment-release (paññā-vimutti) and awareness-release (ceto-vimutti).
<i>vinaya</i>	The Buddhist monastic code of conduct and discipline.
<i>viññāṇa</i>	Consciousness, cognisance. One of the five aggregates (khandhas).
<i>vipassanā</i>	Clear intuitive insight. Aided by a clear, quiet state of meditative calm. Vipassanā is spontaneous insight into physical and mental phenomena, as they arise and cease, that sees them for what they really are: inherently impermanent and unstable, bound up with pain and suffering, and devoid of anything that can be identified as 'self'.
<i>vipassanā-bhāvanā</i>	Development of insights through meditation or mental cultivation.
<i>virīya</i>	Persistence; energy. One of the ten perfections (pāramīs), the seven factors of enlightenment (bojjhaṅga), the five spiritual faculties/powers (bala), and the five strengths/dominant factors (indriya). One of the four spiritual powers (iddhipāda).
<i>wat</i>	(Thai). Monastery, temple-monastery, temple.

Sources:

*A Glossary of Pāli and Buddhist Terms.*

[www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org)

*Dictionary of Buddhism, Part II: Thai–English Buddhist Dictionary (6th Ed.).*

[www.tipitaka.org](http://www.tipitaka.org)

*Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines.*

[www.budsas.org](http://www.budsas.org)

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## *Daily Schedule*

6:00—7:30

Alms round at Baan Amphur  
(approximate time depending on the season).

8:00—10:00

Morning meal and conversation with visitors  
afterwards at the dining hall (except for Uposatha Days,  
weekends, and national holidays).

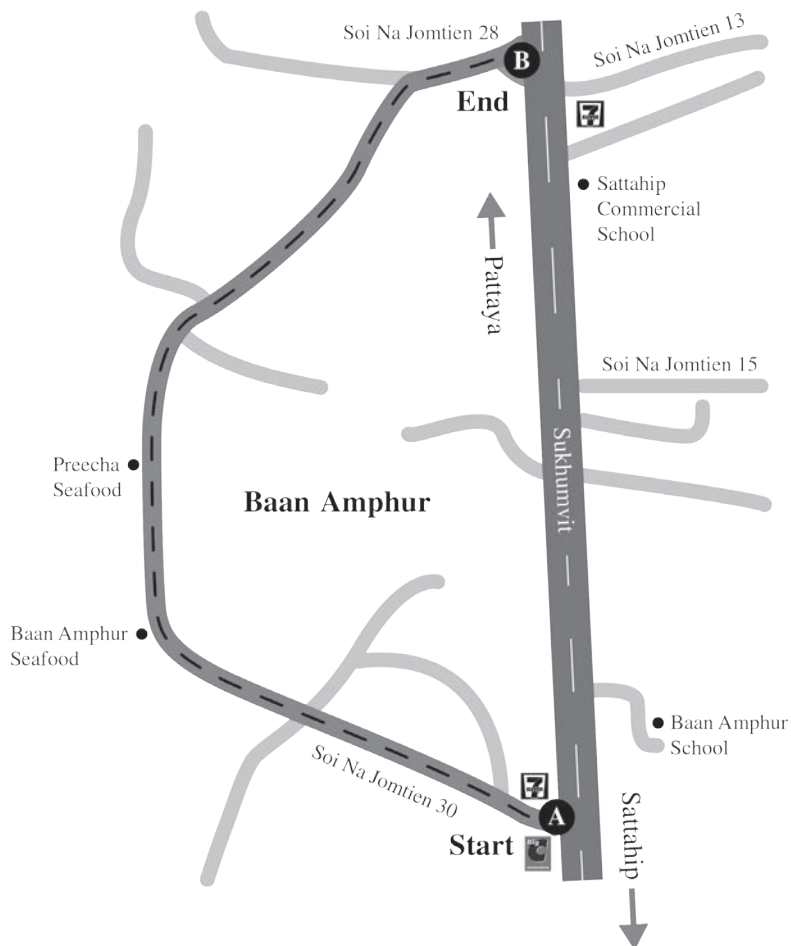
14:00—16:00

Dhamma talk and conversation with visitors  
at Chula-dhamma Sālā on Khao Chi-On.

**\*\*Kindly visit Phra Ajahn within the scheduled time only.**

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## *Alms Route*



## *Further readings and Dhamma*

More teachings on Theravāda Buddhism and the contemporary Thai forest tradition can be found at the following websites:

- Recorded teachings of Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto in English and Thai

[www.phrasuchart.com](http://www.phrasuchart.com)

[www.facebook.com/AjahnSuchartAbhijato](https://www.facebook.com/AjahnSuchartAbhijato)

[www.kammatthana.com](http://www.kammatthana.com)

- English translation of Theravāda Tipiṭaka and a selection of teaching from the Thai forest meditation masters

[www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org)

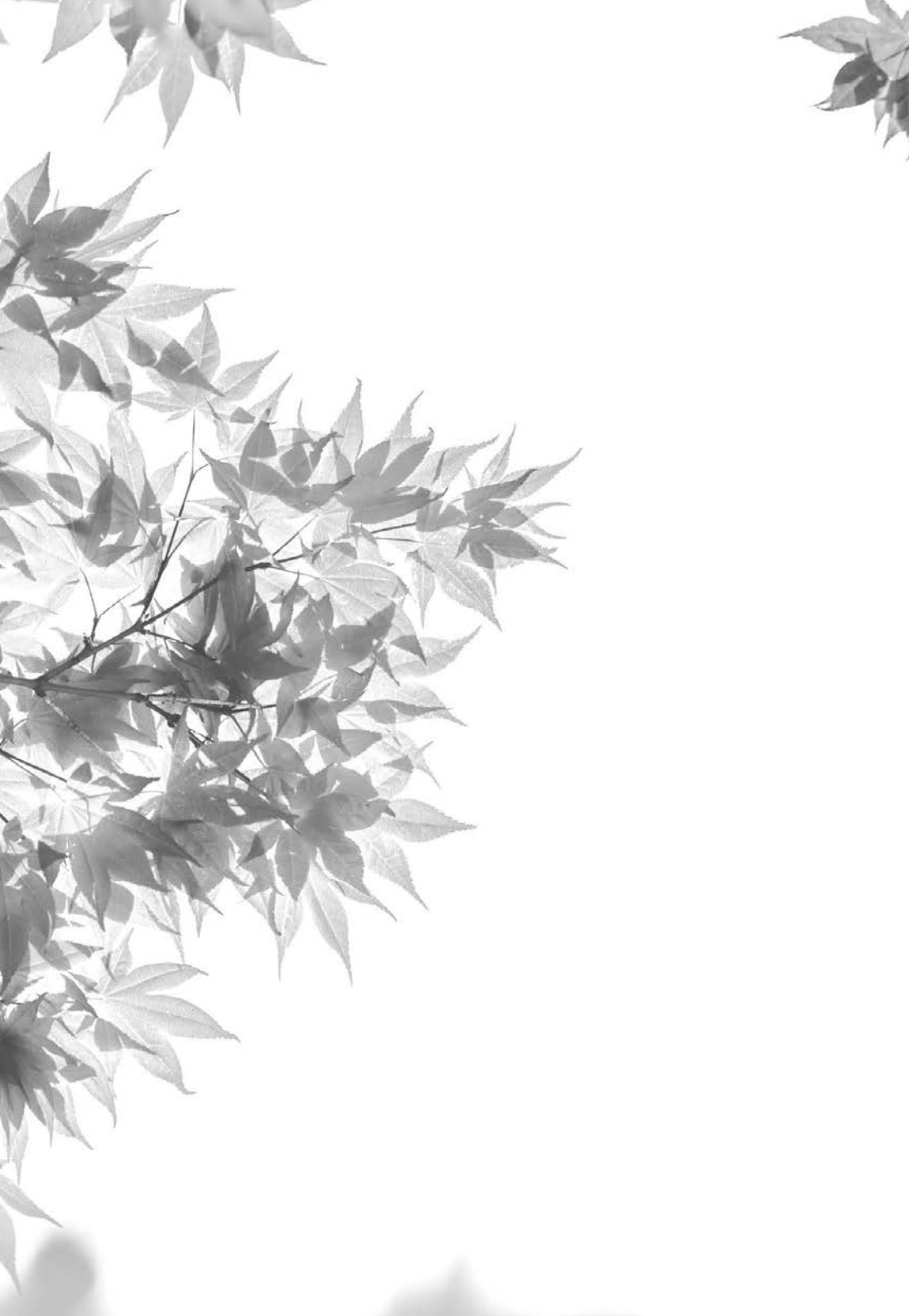
- Translation in various languages of the teachings by Luangta Mahā Boowa

[www.forestdhamma.org](http://www.forestdhamma.org)

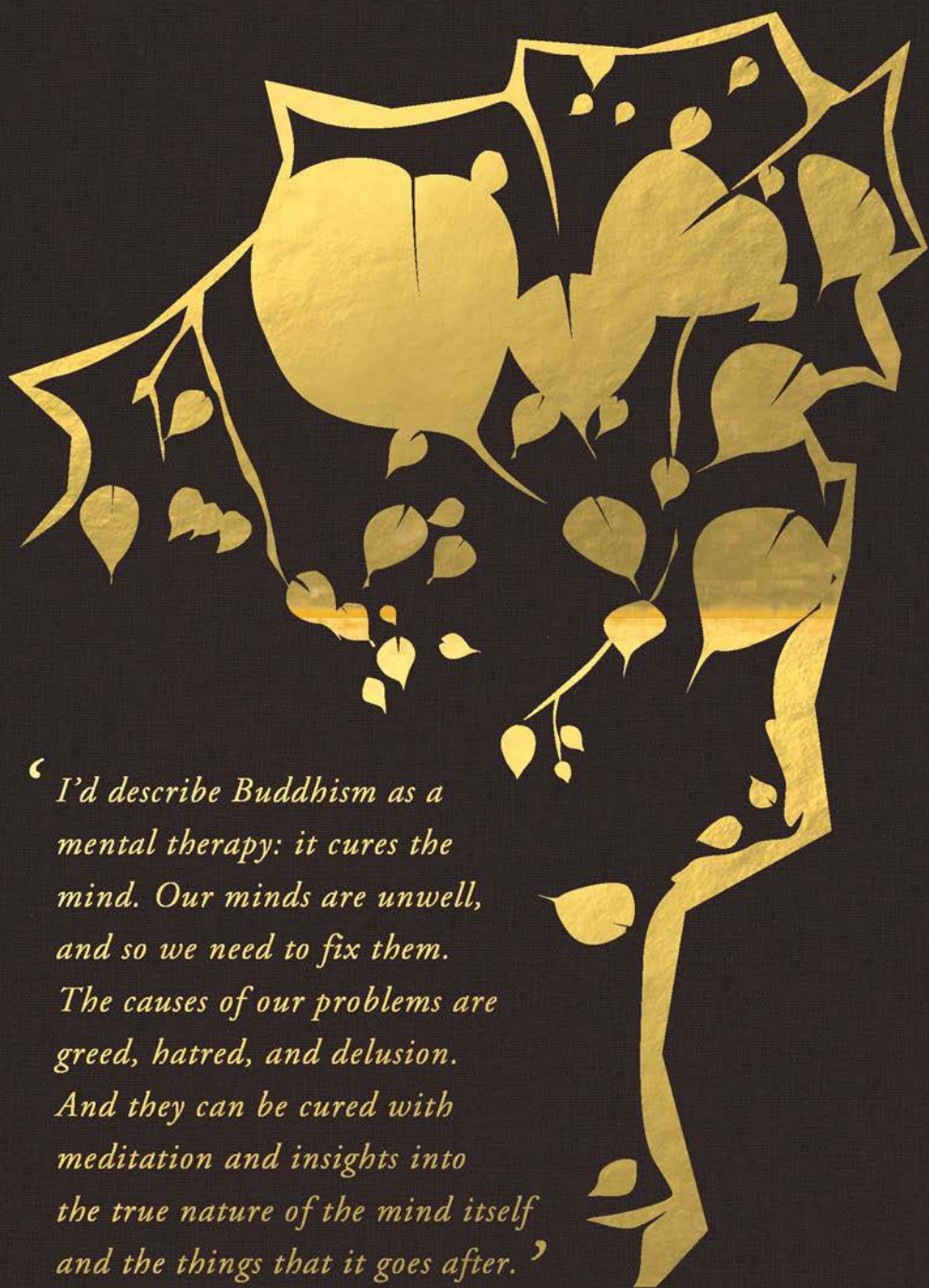
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*‘I’d describe Buddhism as a mental therapy: it cures the mind. Our minds are unwell, and so we need to fix them. The causes of our problems are greed, hatred, and delusion. And they can be cured with meditation and insights into the true nature of the mind itself and the things that it goes after.’*